THE GUARDSMAN

BY

FRANZ MOLNAR

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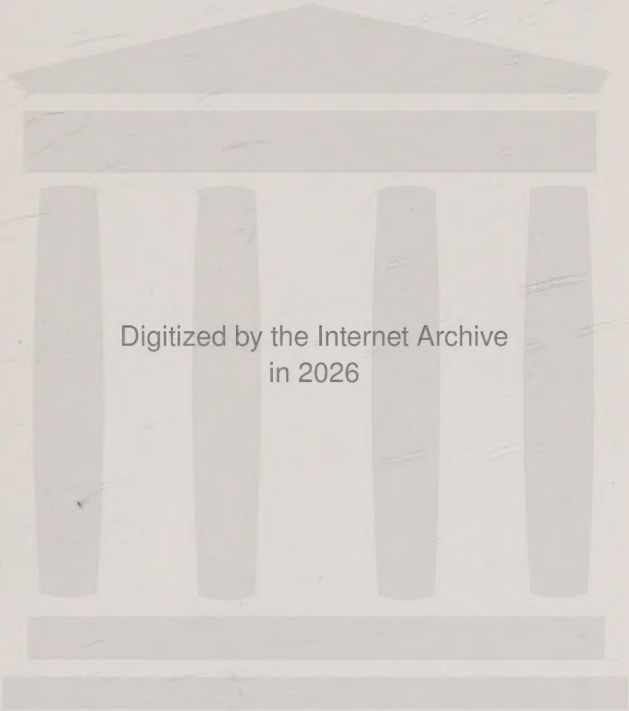
THE GUARDSMAN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Setting by Jo Mielziner Photo by Francis Bruguiere

ALFRED LUNT AND LYNN FONTANNE IN ACT II OF THE THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION.

THE GUARDSMAN

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

FRANZ MOLNAR

TRANSLATION BY

GRACE I. COLBRON AND HANS BARTSCH

ACTING VERSION BY

PHILIP MOELLER

FOREWORD BY

THERESA HELBURN

THE THEATER GUILD VERSION
WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE
THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION

BONI AND LIVERIGHT
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HANS BARTSCH

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The cast of the THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION as originally presented at the Garrick Theater, October 13, 1924.

THE GUARDSMAN

A Comedy in Three Acts by

FRANZ MOLNAR

Translation by Grace I. Colbron and Hans Bartsch. Acting version by Philip Moeller. The production directed by Philip Moeller. Settings by Jo Mielziner.

CHARACTERS

The Actor.....ALFRED LUNT
The Actress, his wife.....LYNN FONTANNE
The Critic.....DUDLEY DIGGES
"Mama".....HELEN WESTLEY
Liesl.....EDITH MEISER
A Creditor.....PHILIP LOEB
An Usher.....KATHRYN WILSON

SCENES

ACT I. Living room of the Actor's home. Afternoon.
ACT II. A box at the opera. The same evening.
ACT III. Same as Act I. The following afternoon.

Stage Manager, Philip Loeb
The music is under the direction of Max Weiser
The singers of the opera are:
Zona Maie Griswold, Maurice Soble

The THEATER GUILD, Inc.

Board of Managers: Theresa Helburn, Lawrence Langner, Philip Moeller, Lee Simonson, Maurice Wertheim, Helen Westley. Executive Director, Theresa Helburn. Scenic Director, Lee Simonson; Play Reading Department, Courtenay Lemon; Business Manager, Warren P. Munsell; Technical Director, Carolyn Hancock; Press Representative, Ruth Benedict; Subscription Secretary, Addie Williams; Stage Managers, Philip Loeb and Robert L. Cook.

Address communications to the Theater Guild, Inc., 65 West Thirty-fifth Street, New York City.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in Act II of the Theater Guild Production . *Frontispiece*

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FOREWORD

NOTES ON THE THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION OF "THE GUARDSMAN"

The play is undoubtedly the most ephemeral of literary forms. It is the most closely associated with the topics and mood of its time and therefore the quickest to become dated or stale. It is a mooted question as to how long Shakespeare the playwright would have survived without Shakespeare the poet. Poetry is the most universal and the most permanent of literary mediums, but it takes all of its strength to save the play from oblivion. Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare and Molière—great poets all of them—what other ancient playwrights count today with the possible exception in English of Sheridan, who is still a newcomer with scarcely more than a century between the date of his death and the latest revival of his work.

All of which preamble brings me to the essential problem of the Theater Guild production of "The Guardsman." This comedy, which is perhaps the most delightful of Molnar's lighter plays, was written in 1911, only thirteen years ago, but the theater has moved rapidly in the last decade, and while the

brilliance of the idea and its inherent satire remain undimmed, elements of both content and technique were distinctly dated. Indeed, the original manuscript contained monologues for the benefit of the audience, inadequately motivated exits and entrances in order to leave certain characters alone on the stage, and other survivals from the period when audiences were less exacting. All these had, of course, to be eliminated. But there were much subtler changes yet to be made in order that the present version should have the spontaneous quality of the original. Miss Colbron and Mr. Bartsch had prepared an excellent translation, and while the Theater Guild has always stood against adaptations and for producing foreign plays as closely as possible to the original, it has known that this closeness cannot be achieved by merely translating. The purpose of a translation is to render the original into correct English, of an acting version to recreate the mood and intention of the playwright. People simply do not talk in one language as they do in another, and therefore, often the more accurate the translation, the more foreign it seems. The American idiom is simpler and the American attack is more direct, and the task that Mr. Moeller accomplished in preparing the present version included not only necessary cutting and rearranging, the avoidance of the inevitable clichés of a play written a decade ago, but occasionally a genuinely

creative rewriting to bring out the author's intention with the same vividness for an American audience of 1924 as the original had done for a Hungarian of 1911.

There was also the problem of the Guardsman's nationality. In the original play he was not a Russian, but an Austrian, and the change in dialect was merely that from colloquial Hungarian to the somewhat affected and accented Hungarian that the Austrian nobleman spoke. The closest rendering of this might have been the difference between colloquial American speech and the very marked English method. But we felt that this would have a comic and not at all a romantic quality. We, therefore, decided to make the Guardsman a military attaché at the Russian embassy, thereby adding a romantic strangeness and allowing to the actor's disguise the assistance of a very marked change in diction.

An adjustment of method was necessary in the acting as well as the text. It is probable from the writing that the actor who originally created the rôle in Vienna made use of the flamboyant method of the old continental school, registering every point with neatness and skill—doubtless an excellent comedy performance, but one which would have been alien to our present acting traditions. The stage directions on the original manuscript imply that the actor as Guardsman frankly took the audience into the game, turned aside frequently

as the Guardsman to grimace across the footlights as the Actor; in fact, wrote notes all along the margin of his own performance for the benefit or amusement of those out front. To us today, this is a method rather for farce or burlesque than for comedy. When Mr. Lunt once assumed the rôle of the Guardsman, he knew he must never deviate from it, because as an actor and as *the* Actor, he was committed irrevocably to the rôle he had undertaken. No matter what elation or sorrow he felt at his wife's reactions, he must never lose the part he was playing for her benefit, though he must still convey to the audience the double emotion through which he is passing as both husband and lover, a task infinitely more difficult than that of the direct comedy method.

Miss Fontanne had an equally exacting problem in the rôle of the Wife. Whether or not Molnar presumed a complete granting by the audience of the comic and romantic premise that the lady was entirely deceived by the Guardsman, may never be definitely settled, but it is probable that the earlier audiences were more inclined to a complete sentimental concession than ours. Miss Fontanne enlists our credulity without overstraining it. She induces us to grant the original comic premise—that the Actress does not recognize the Guardsman—confirms us in this concession and then plays ever so delicately with us. It is only in one or two

faintly ambiguous transitions that we find ourselves momentarily wondering whether we are not the dupes instead of the lady. So slight is the ambiguity that we scarcely recognize our suspicions—but they add a satiric overtone that prevents the romantic note becoming sentimental. The original manuscript indicates a much more definite start on the part of the Actress when she first hears her husband talking with the voice of the Guardsman in the last act than either the director or Miss Fontanne felt germane to this production. The playing of this moment seems to me indeed one of the high spots in the present performance, and certainly tickles the palate of the audience. At the moment when the Actor rises from behind the trunk in the partial make-up of the Guardsman and reassumes his Russian accent, the Actress is lying prone on the couch reading a book. There is no sudden gesture. Very slowly the book is lowered, the Actress looks back and up at the figure towering above her and her lips gradually curve in a smile. It may be the moment of recognition for her, it may be she has recognized him a few minutes before, it may be she has known him all along. Every member of the audience is free to answer the question. The sophisticated will take it one way, the romantic another, and this, I believe, is Molnar's intention. No matter what he himself thinks on the subject—

and he doubtless has a definite if unadmitted point of view—he wants his audience to form their own opinions.

I do not know what the décor in the original production was like, but when Mr. Mielziner came to the designing of the scenes he was confronted by three possibilities. Should he go in merely for beauty in the first set in the home of the Actor and Actress? Should he get a modern Viennese quality by using the Wiener-Werkstäte school of decoration, or should he sacrifice both the idea of beauty and modernity for a note of satiric realism? Mr. Mielziner's long residence in Vienna—he was a student of Joseph Urban—had made him familiar with the usual bad taste of the successful actor who had risen from a simple bourgeoisie to desire pretentiousness rather than beauty and the impression of costliness rather than comfort. He therefore chose to furnish his apartment in bad Louis XV furniture, to clutter it with knickknacks, statuettes, and photographs, and the result was an amusing, convincing and characteristic living room. The setting of the second act in the opera box and the anteroom offered many more technical problems than the lay mind suspects. Mr. Mielziner surmounted them with remarkable success. The red damask with its black marble trim accurately evoked the atmosphere of the continental opera house, and the box itself, looking out over a darkened auditorium, left

to the imagination of the audience what the old-fashioned painted back drop of fifteen years ago tried and failed to accomplish.

"The Guardsman" was produced in America several years before the Theater Guild attempted it and it was a disastrous failure. It was withdrawn in two weeks' time. The cast was inadequate and just how much help or hindrance was given by the version and the scenic artist, I do not know. But I do know this, that this delightful and brilliant comedy is so delicately adjusted, so fragile, so closely balanced between romance and reality, farce and comedy, that it took everything we could give it in the way of casting and production to weave the delicate fabric into a success for American audiences. Indeed, we held the play two years before producing it, having learned from its previous failure in this country that it must be staged under exactly the right auspices—or shall I say favoring constellations—to have a chance. But at last the stars in their courses were propitious, and when we had gathered into the same cast Mr. Lunt, Miss Fontanne, Mr. Digges and Miss Westley we had no further fears.

THERESA HELBURN.

New York, December, 1924.

THE GUARDSMAN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

THE ACTOR
THE ACTRESS, *his wife*
THE CRITIC, *Dr. Bernhard*
"MAMA"
LIESL
A CREDITOR
AN USHER AT THE THEATER

SCENES

ACT I. Living room in the Actor's home. Afternoon.
ACT II. An Opera Box. That evening.
ACT III. Living room in the Actor's home. The following afternoon.

ACT I

Setting by Jo Mielziner Photo by Francis Bruguiere

THE OPENING AND CLOSING SCENES OF THE THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION.

THE GUARDSMAN

ACT I

SCENE: *The living room of the Actor and his wife, the Actress,* MARIE. *Both are popular Viennese stage favorites. Their living room is old and large with a kind of stale elegance. Souvenirs, wreaths, lettered ribbons, handsome showy furniture crowd the room. It is a late afternoon in Spring, gradually growing dark as the act progresses.*

Up center is a large window; before it to the stage left of it is a grand piano crowded with flowers, papers, music, novels, candy boxes, and a lamp.

In front of the piano is a sofa. A half-round table is at the left end of the sofa. An arm-chair stands left by the fireplace, and there is a settee right.

There are entrances at the upstage corner, left, and up and down stage, right. The upstage right entrance leads by two on stage steps to the outside door of the apartment. The down stage right entrance is to the kitchen

and the upstage left entrance to the Actress's boudoir and the other rooms of the apartment.

At Rise: *The* Actor *sits on settee, right. The* Critic *is in the armchair, left, reading a newspaper. The* Actress *is sitting at the piano playing Chopin's Nocturne in Eb-op. 9. No. 2.* Mama *and* Liesl, *the maid, are packing costumes into an old-fashioned leather trunk right center. There is a confusion of voices throughout the room.*

MAMA

[*To* Liesl.]

I've been on my knees for the last half hour and he hasn't yet told me if he wants the Princivalli costumes.

LIESL

Well, I wish you'd hurry up and ask him— I'm getting housemaid's knee—listening to this scrap.

MAMA

[*To* Actor.]

You don't need the Princivalli costumes?

ACTOR

No, I don't need the Princivalli costumes.

MAMA

You don't play "Monna Vanna"?

ACTOR

[*Nervous.*]

No, I don't play "Monna Vanna." Haven't I just told you that I don't need the Princivalli costumes?

MAMA

Oh, all right . . . all right . . . all right.

ACTRESS

[*Still playing.*]

All right, all right, all right. Will you two ever stop quarreling?

ACTOR

Every damn time I go on tour this same thing happens.

CRITIC

Oh, my dear children, for Heaven's sake. . . . Why do you——

ACTOR

Mama has more sense than all three of us put together, but she pretends to be a driveling idiot, just to make me nervous.

MAMA

Make you nervous? Well, why don't you hit me? . . . why don't you?

ACTRESS

Oh, Mama . . . Mama.

CRITIC

Mama!

ACTOR

Why does she annoy me like this? Why does she tell me to hit her? It's just to make me more nervous than I am.

[MAMA, LIESL, *and* CRITIC, ACTOR, *are all talking.*]

ACTRESS

[*Interrupting.*]

Mama, I have just one thing to say to you! Mama . . . you'll end by making *me* nervous, too. Will you listen to me— Then I'll—I'll throw you out. [*Silence.*]

MAMA

[*Gets up and goes sadly to* CRITIC.]

A nice way to talk to a mother! A nice way to talk to a mother!

ACTRESS

I've been talking to you that way for nine years. . . . And you're just beginning to get excited over it now?

CRITIC

Nine years already?

ACTRESS

She's been cook for two years for twenty gulden

a month. She's been mama when I need her for seven. For that she gets fifty.

MAMA

I'll not be here seven years more—that's one sure thing.

ACTOR

Don't frighten me so—the very thought breaks my heart.

LIESL

[*To* ACTOR.]
Is there anything else, sir?

ACTOR

No, get my bags. [LIESL *exits, left.*]

MAMA

Now you see the way he talks to me, dearie.

ACTOR

Haven't I told you at least a thousand times, not to be so familiar with my wife!

MAMA

Not even that? . . . Oh, I know you don't like me. It's six months now since you and Marie were married and all that time I've treated you like my

own son. [*To* CRITIC.] I—I can't stand it any longer. [*Sits sofa.*] I can't stand it any longer.

CRITIC

[*Behind newspaper.*]

I've always told you . . . it's bad enough being the mother of an actress even when you've brought her into the world—but it's much worse when she's been handed you ready-made.

MAMA

I know you, my friend, and I know exactly why *you* don't like me. But at least you have your reasons.

ACTOR

[*Rises in rage.*]

Mama!

MAMA

Oh, very well.

[*She rises, bangs the trunk lid down and goes out, left, slamming the door behind her. Pause.*]

LIESL

[*Reënters with grips.*]

Here are your bags, sir.

[*She hands the trunk keys to the* ACTOR.]

ACTOR

Have the men take them downstairs.

LIESL

Yes, sir. [*Off with the grips.*]

CRITIC

How long is this engagement for?

ACTOR

Three nights, I play Romeo, Hamlet, and "Fire in the Opera House."

ACTRESS

Then you'll be home again by Friday?

ACTOR

Friday. [*Kicks trunk.*]

ACTRESS

You're nervous.

ACTOR

I am nervous. [*Kicks trunk.*]

ACTRESS

You are just a little—unendurable.

ACTOR

I am just a little—unendurable.

ACTRESS

In that case it's wisest to leave you entirely alone.

ACTOR

It's wisest to leave me entirely alone.

CRITIC

Hm.

ACTRESS

So it goes. [*Crosses*, left.]

ACTOR

So it goes.

CRITIC

Good God! What would our so-called "dear public" think if it should hear its two popular favorites talking to one another like this?

ACTRESS

I talk sweetly enough to him on the stage—but at home——

[*The* CONCIERGE *and* LIESL *enter for the trunk. Until they go out the quarrel between* ACTOR *and* ACTRESS *continues.*]

ACTOR

I wish you'd show me less sweetness in the theater and more at home.

ACTRESS

I show you all the sweetness you deserve.

ACTOR

And who's to judge what I deserve?

ACTRESS

I'm a judge of what you deserve from me.

ACTOR

That's the way she talks to me.

CRITIC

Well, look at the way you talk to her.

ACTOR

Yes, yes.

ACTRESS

Day in, day out. [*She goes up, left.*]

ACTOR

[*Walking, right.*]

Only six months married—and we've come to this!

CRITIC

Whose fault is it? Yours, yours only. I haven't left her side for eight years and she's sweeter to me than ever.

ACTOR

It's easy for you—she doesn't love *you*——

ACTRESS

Oh, well—if you're talking of love——

ACTOR

I know—I know. You don't love me! Say it, sweetheart—you haven't said it today yet. Tell me that you no longer love me—keep on saying it—let me get used to it. I knew your love never lasted very long but I confess I scarcely looked for the end before September. [*Crosses, right.*] And now it's only May.

ACTRESS

[*Looking out of the window.*]
May——

CRITIC

Beautiful spring— Beautiful May!

ACTRESS

A beautiful May——

ACTOR

[*Goes to right of her.*]
What are you crying about?

ACTRESS

I am not crying.

ACTOR

Then why do you pretend to be crying?

ACTRESS

It's a feeling that comes over me sometimes.

ACTOR

I know what you're crying about—I'm afraid I know.

ACTRESS

If you know—why do you ask?

ACTOR

[*Crosses, right, and walking up and down.*]

Let us separate then—let us get a divorce—let us confess honestly that this is the end. You go one way, I'll go another. You will have your consolations, I'll have mine. That will be better than this sort of thing—these everlasting lies, these hidden tears, these threatening eyes, this sulking in your corner, this—this Chopin music—this——

LIESL

[*Enters, right, and interrupts him.*]

There's a man outside.

ACTOR

What does he want?

LIESL

I don't know, but he's got a bill.

ACTOR

Show him in.

LIESL

Come in.

CREDITOR

Good afternoon. Good afternoon.

ACTOR

[*Very amiably.*]

Well, well, my friend. What can I do for you?

CREDITOR

[*Looks slyly at* CRITIC.]

What can he do for me? You know I hate to disturb a great artist like yourself, but if you could let me have just a little bit on account. The whole thing is only four hundred and sixty kronen. I tell you, Weinlovitz is in a temper. The whole day I been calling on actors and——

ACTOR

[*To the* CRITIC.]

What are they playing at the theater tonight?

CRITIC

Midsummernight's Dream.

ACTOR

[*To* CREDITOR.]

Have you ever seen "Midsummernight's Dream"?

CREDITOR

Have I ever seen Midsummers night Dream? Isn't Mr. Krauss in that show? Doesn't he owe me six hundred kronen? You know just as well as I do that Krauss plays "Oberon."

ACTOR

Yes, I know. He's very bad.

CREDITOR

Well, I don't know. You know when it comes to acting some like this and some like that and after all who knows——

ACTOR

What is the bill for tomorrow night?

CRITIC

"Salomé."

ACTOR

Have you seen "Salomé"?

CREDITOR

Well, I'm a married man and you know that dance—well I'll take them.

[CRITIC *hands his fountain pen to* ACTOR, *who takes out a card and writes on it.*]

ACTOR

What's your name?

CREDITOR

Rosenzweig.

ACTOR

You don't say so. [*He makes out pass and hands it to* CREDITOR, *who looks at it and then asks.*]

CREDITOR

Excuse me, couldn't you make it four?

ACTOR

How much did you say your bill was for?

CREDITOR

Four hundred and sixty kronen.

CRITIC

Don't you know, my dear fellow, the rate is two tickets under five hundred kronen!

ACTOR

Well, we'll make an exception in this case. He seems to be so fond of the theater.

[*Hands corrected pass to* CREDITOR.]

CREDITOR

Thank you. Thank you. [*He starts out and is stopped by the* ACTRESS *who tosses him a rose.*]

ACTRESS

Here's a rose for you, too.

[CREDITOR *exits.* ACTRESS *sits at piano and plays Chopin.*]

ACTOR

Will you do me a great favor?

ACTRESS

What is it, dear?

ACTOR

Don't play Chopin.

ACTRESS

Why not?

ACTOR

Because Chopin is not meant for me.

ACTRESS

For whom then?

ACTOR

[*Comes toward* CRITIC.]

You know women love Chopin because he puts them in a mood—a mood of boundless romance—of longing, of desire of—of—in short, all the things that a decent married woman should not be thinking about.

ACTRESS

Oh, very well. [*She stops playing.*] Then I must not even do that now!

ACTOR

[*Across piano.*]

Now you are happy. Now you're a martyr, a lamb led to the sacrifice—a suffering angel—aren't you, you poor thing?

ACTRESS

If you knew how little I'm suffering you wouldn't be in such good spirits.

ACTOR

And then this contempt—this haughty scorn. You may not know it, my friend, but she hates the whole tribe of professionals. [CRITIC *moves significantly.*] She simply doesn't like actors. Only I

didn't find that out until after I'd fallen in love with her. She despises me. She ignores me, she doesn't speak to me—she——

LIESL

[*Comes in with a bunch of red roses.*]
Excuse me, ma'am, these came for you.

ACTRESS

Was there any message? Oh, what beautiful flowers! Was there any message?

LIESL

No, ma'am.

CRITIC

I wonder who sent them?

ACTOR

[*Sits sofa, left.*]
I don't ask questions any more. Some silly girl, evidently. It isn't the first time by any means—oh, no, my dear friend! She gets flowers all the time. [*The* ACTRESS, *holding the roses, catches sight of small envelope—wired to one of the stems. She loosens it cautiously from its place and tries to hide it.*] That's right, hide it quickly before I see it!

ACTRESS

Hide what?

ACTOR

The envelope you found in the roses containing your admirer's card, with the declaration of his love. Give me that envelope!

ACTRESS

There was no envelope in the flowers.

ACTOR

There was. Give it to me at once.

ACTRESS

I will *not*.

ACTOR

[*Rises.*]

I command you to give it to me. I want to know who the man is who expresses his admiration in red roses. This is the tenth bouquet at least—admiration has its limits!

ACTRESS

I will not give it to you.

ACTOR

There—look at her! See her eyes flash! She

thinks she'll get out of it that way. I command you to give me that letter!

ACTRESS

[*Rises and comes to him.*]

I will not! You are right. There was a letter. But I will not give it to you. Yes, I know what name is on that card—but I will not tell it to you. Yes, the man who sent those flowers does admire me—does appreciate me—does love me, but I will not give you the letter. Now then.

[*The* ACTOR *looks at the* CRITIC *who walks away from the quarrel and up to the window going right, and then up stage.*]

CRITIC

Yes, it is May now. The beautiful month of May.

ACTOR

And this is what we have come to after six months of married life!

ACTRESS

Yes, this is what we have come to.

[*She exits, left, slamming door.*]

ACTOR

[*Poses at door.*]

"Like bitter fruit, no longer taste alluring——"

[*Clears throat and turns to* CRITIC.]

"Like bitter fruit, no longer taste alluring,
All sweetness lacking, and all fragrance vanished;
So, too, the heart——"

CRITIC

Oh, for God's sake! [*He crosses down, right, to settee.*] You know a situation like this is exceedingly trying to an old friend of the family. How can you so forget yourself? If you really must find out who sent the flowers, there are a thousand ways to do it without treating your wife like that. You know her, you know she'd rather cut her head off than tell you who sent them. The simplest way is to go and ask the florist.

ACTOR

[*Crosses down and right.*]
Why should I ask him?

CRITIC

You want to know who sent them, don't you?

ACTOR

I know who sent them.

CRITIC

You know?

ACTOR

Of course I know!

CRITIC

Very well, then—who sent them?

ACTOR

I did.

[*Crosses, right.*]

CRITIC

What? You? *You* sent them?

ACTOR

Exactly. I sent them.

CRITIC

Are you crazy?

ACTOR

I am.

CRITIC

Well, I'll be damned! [*In a change of tone.*] You sent the roses? *Your* name is on the card?

ACTOR

No, it is not.

CRITIC

Whose is then?

ACTOR

I can't keep it to myself any longer. I've got to tell someone. Listen!

CRITIC

What's the trouble?

ACTOR

You know who—*what* Marie was before I married her?

CRITIC

I know—I mean I suspect at least.

ACTOR

We both knew whatever there was to know. Why should we be ashamed to speak of it? She had many lovers—very many— If I should count merely those whom I knew personally—Hartung, Zellenberg—Krauss——

CRITIC

Don't bother—I made the inventory long ago—there were nine.

ACTOR

Counting me?

CRITIC

Without you.

ACTOR

Pardon me! There were seven.

CRITIC

You haven't counted Hochberg.

ACTOR

Of course not. That was only malicious gossip. Then there was Kohazy. He was madly in love with her but she couldn't endure him.

CRITIC

Very well, then—seven real cases—one gossip—and one she couldn't endure—nine altogether.

ACTOR

Seven!

CRITIC

Nine!

ACTOR

I cannot allow anyone to cast aspersions upon my wife—there were seven.

CRITIC

Very well, we'll say seven. And even those seven we can't be sure about. The only thing we can be sure about is that I wasn't one of them.

ACTOR

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, old man, but don't weep over it now. There are more important things to talk about. We were married in December and now it's May—the six months are up—that fatal half year, that's as long as she can stand any of them. Now spring has come, and I feel that this apparently calm and cool little woman is all aflame inside—that she is losing control of herself. In a word, I'm in for the same fate as all the others. The marriage ceremony was all in vain—he is coming—I hear his footsteps—coming nearer and nearer.

CRITIC

Whose footsteps?

ACTOR

The tenth. The eighth—anyway, the new man. I feel he is coming—he is coming as surely as spring.

CRITIC

Hm! Hm! What makes you think so?

ACTOR

Chopin—day dreams. She sits alone in the dark dreaming, she won't even light the lamp.

CRITIC

She won't light the lamp.

ACTOR

No, she won't even let the servants light the lamp.

CRITIC

She won't even let the servants light the lamp.

ACTOR

No.

CRITIC

That's bad.

ACTOR

I speak to her, she looks at me, but she doesn't hear me.

CRITIC

Very bad.

ACTOR

She gazes out of the window and plays Chopin; when she doesn't gaze out of the window she plays Chopin—she weeps when she's alone—that wouldn't be so bad—but if I take any notice of it she denies it—that is very bad.

CRITIC

That *is* very bad.

ACTOR

I have tried to sound the very depths of her thoughts——

CRITIC

Oh, that's worse. Well——

ACTOR

I have lost her—I feel it. Oh, what do I care, but at least I want to know what it is she wants. [CRITIC *looks at him.*] I'm a fool, and I'm in love. Dear Lord, I even thought that if I could ever find out what sort of man she is longing for, I would try to be that man myself. That's a good idea.

CRITIC

Don't be ridiculous.

ACTOR

You don't understand. What I mean is: I'd really try to be that man myself.

CRITIC

What kind of man?

ACTOR

I know what kind of man.

CRITIC

How?

ACTOR

We've talked it over calmly, very calmly.

CRITIC

Indeed.

ACTOR

She's explained it to me by the hour. What she's longing for is a soldier.

CRITIC

Oh, come. A soldier.

ACTOR

I don't mean the ordinary Hussar type, a young lieutenant. She's had all that, that's passé. She's set her heart on something different, something foreign.

CRITIC

Foreign?

ACTOR

Yes, she told me that this soldier of her imagination is her ideal type of man, but that there are no such men nowadays. You know that's how women are.

CRITIC

Quite so.

ACTOR

But I've thought it all over, and such men do exist. Do you know what I thought of?

CRITIC

What?

ACTOR

One of those mysterious Russian Guardsmen attached to the Russian Embassy. What if she should meet a man like that?

CRITIC

What?

ACTOR

It would mean the end of me; my life would be crushed and broken. Here would be me, this tortured loving me, and there this nobody whom I could impersonate on the stage any minute. It's a Guardsman she wants. She wants a Guardsman. I know it, I know it!

CRITIC

Well?

ACTOR

But I won't give in as easy as that, my friend. This is no mere episode. I've been in love often enough in my life—and yet—God knows—I've never been really in love until now. This time it is the last—the greatest, the most torturing love, the love that exhausts my innermost power of feeling—the richest in beauty, the richest in pain——

LIESL

[*Enters, right.*]
Please, sir, the man is here again.

ACTOR

What man?

LIESL

The man with the bill.

ACTOR

What does he want?

LIESL

He says he doesn't want the tickets for tomorrow.

ACTOR

Why—why?

LIESL

Because you're not in the play, sir. He thought you were in the play, and he says that when you're not in the play the whole thing isn't worth anything.

ACTOR

Tell him to go away. Can't you see I'm busy? [LIESL *runs out.*] Very well, then, as I said—I tried to find out what sort of man—no, no— [*Recalling.*] Love, love, the richest in beauty, the richest in pain! Oh, yes. This is the love to which we cling

with all our strength. No one—no one—shall take this woman from me! This is no mere episode. It is my fate—my all. No, not even if it means my ruin. I say, you know it's mighty decent of a simple fellow like that to refuse to go to the theater when I'm not acting. Believe me, that makes me feel good.

CRITIC

Oh, yes.

ACTOR

[*Goes up to door, right.*]
Is the man still there?

LIESL

[*Outside door.*]
No, sir; he's gone.

ACTOR

[*Returns to* CRITIC.]
Well, as I said, all at once I saw clearly that the end had come, that she was drifting away from me day by day. The Guardsman is approaching—and then one fine day I made up my mind.

CRITIC

To, so to speak, meet him halfway.

ACTOR

Not exactly. But I said to myself—she needs a

new man, a new sensation, she needs a Guardsman. Very well, she shall have him. I will be that man myself; I will play the Guardsman.

CRITIC

What?

ACTOR

Well, you critics say of an actor that a hundred different personalities live in his one soul. Very well, then, why shouldn't this Guardsman live within my soul?

CRITIC

W-what?

ACTOR

[*More and more excited.*]

Either I am a good actor, or I am not. This will be the supreme test.

CRITIC

Do you mean to tell me that you intend to act a part for your wife?

ACTOR

Exactly.

CRITIC

That is absurd.

ACTOR

Quite absurd. . . . Every man who loves, and is not loved in return, is absurd.

CRITIC

And how are you going to carry out this plan?

ACTOR

[*Rising.*]

Perfectly simple. I will disguise myself as a Guardsman, play my part, conquer her. I will make her love me again.

CRITIC

Ridiculous——

ACTOR

Everything is ridiculous—that a cast-off lover may do—except shoot himself. No, I'll try the ridiculous first.

CRITIC

Has it really gone that far?

ACTOR

That far—that far—that far——

[*He buries his face in his hands.*]

CRITIC

I say, you aren't going to cry about it?

ACTOR

I can't help it. I'm so used to shedding real tears on the stage that I can't always keep them back at home.

CRITIC

But you don't mind if I laugh at all this, do you?

ACTOR

I don't mind at all. I laughed at it often enough myself, at first. Later, I merely smiled. And then my brain began to work——

CRITIC

Hm.

ACTOR

You know how an actor's brain works when he takes up a new part. Well, that's how this part got into my blood and won't let me go.

CRITIC

But then——

ACTOR

I began to work it out. I planned all the details, costume, make-up, voice, step, carriage and gesture, everything—realizing all the time that this woman is irretrievably lost to me, that only in this way could I ever bring my wife to love me again. You understand?

CRITIC

Suppose she recognizes you?

ACTOR

Then she's recognized me. Things can't be any worse than they are now.

CRITIC

If she does not recognize you. What then?

ACTOR

Then one of two things will happen. Either she will yield or she will not. If she does not, then I will be very happy. For I will know that she is true to me. If she does yield, then I will be very unhappy —but at least I will know.

CRITIC

Um.

ACTOR

But, anyway, I will have had one sincere kiss from her. What if it is the end? [*Crosses, left.*] Better an end of everything than to live on this way.

CRITIC

Well, what have you actually done?

ACTOR

I tell you this thing got possession of me. One day as I was walking down the street I passed a place where they make uniforms, and before I knew

what I was doing, I found myself facing the proprietor and heard myself saying, "I want a complete outfit of an officer of the Russian Imperial Guards."

CRITIC

And the tailor?

ACTOR

Delighted to see me. He knew me, of course. He bowed, and asked: "For a new part?" "Yes," I answered. "Is it a big part, sir, a good part?" "It is indeed," I replied. "The best and biggest part I have ever played. I've never been so afraid of any part before."

CRITIC

And then?

ACTOR

In a few days the complete outfit was delivered to my friend Arnold, next door. I had to let him into the secret, too. The uniform is in his apartment.

CRITIC

Have you had it on yet?

ACTOR

Have I had it on! For days I've been walking up and down in front of that window.

CRITIC

You weren't afraid of being recognized?

ACTOR

No. I believed in myself, in my talent, in my part. If I can do the same thing for money—for fame—why shouldn't I do it when it means far more? I knew I was good. Fifteen times at least—I walked past that window.

CRITIC

And your wife?

ACTOR

She was never there.

CRITIC

Well, then?

ACTOR

But one day she was. It was a Tuesday about twenty-five minutes to seven. She looked down at me as I passed and she seemed to smile. That frightened me—I thought that surely she had recognized me.

CRITIC

I am certain she did.

ACTOR

No! No! I put it to the test. I saluted—oh, modestly, and she immediately pulled down the shade.

She was furious. I was the happiest man in the world as I made my exit, happy as the husband who knows that his wife is true to him—and happy as the actor who has made a success of his part.

CRITIC

Perhaps she was only playing up to you?

ACTOR

No. I have positive proof that she did not recognize me. What do you suppose happened when I came home that evening?

CRITIC

Well?

ACTOR

[*Sits sofa, right.*]

She began to talk about it at supper. She told me that that afternoon an impertinent but very good-looking young officer of the Russian Guards had paraded ostentatiously beneath her window. She seemed very annoyed.

CRITIC

Well, then?

ACTOR

But she said there was something so strange, so

mysterious about him, she couldn't get him out of her mind. Wouldn't that drive you crazy?

CRITIC

Possibly.

ACTOR

You may believe it or not, but the next time I passed she deliberately encouraged me. I saluted and she smiled.

CRITIC

And then?

ACTOR

Then I grew bolder. The next day I sent flowers with a card—I even had cards printed—Wassilly Samsonov—you know that was clever. I apologized for my window promenade. She brought the flowers home that night and I made a terrible scene, just as I did a few minutes ago. You know, that little cat looked at me and told me that they had been sent by some silly girl. Every day after that I sent flowers to her at the theater, but she never brought them home again and never mentioned them to me. Then a letter came.

CRITIC

A letter!

ACTOR

Yes, from me.

CRITIC

From you?

ACTOR

Yes. Oh, I knew what I was doing! I said that I had long been an admirer of the gifted artist, but as we had no mutual friends, I had no way of making her acquaintance. However, I wondered if she had any objections to meeting me personally.

CRITIC

Had she?

ACTOR

Here is her answer. Four words only.

[*Gives* CRITIC *a slip of paper.*]

CRITIC

[*Reads.*]

"I have no objection."

ACTOR

"I have no objection."

CRITIC

Well, this is beginning to interest me.

ACTOR

Don't get excited. I made up my mind to act quickly. Last week I wired the manager of the

theater at Olmutz that I was available for three evenings. He was wild with joy, of course —tumbled all over himself to accept, and announced it in all the papers. Then I sent her another letter. It came yesterday. She thinks she hides it here. [*He opens a book under the piano cover and takes out a letter.*] This is what I wrote: "Dear Madam . . . great and revered artist . . . I see by the newspapers that your husband is to appear in Olmutz for several evenings. Please do not misunderstand if I, as a devoted admirer of your art, ask permission to pay my respects to you in your own home. If nothing happens to prevent, would you have the great kindness to appear in your window at six o'clock tomorrow afternoon?"—That's today. "If you will pull back the curtain and look down into the street I will know that I am the happiest of men. I will be watching from a cab nearby and half an hour later I will do myself the great honor of calling on the lady whose genius is your country's chief pride.

"Most respectfully,

"Your humble servant,

"Wassily Samsonov."

CRITIC

And your engagement in Olmutz?

ACTOR

Called off. I wired this morning, "Unavoidably detained." At six o'clock I leave here, go next door, dress in fifteen minutes and return to my own home for a special star engagement in my own home in the first really great and serious part I have ever played in all my life. Now you know all. The performance begins at six o'clock.

[*He sits on piano stool with back to* CRITIC.]

CRITIC

It's almost six now. What's the matter with you?

ACTOR

[*Abstractedly.*]
What?

CRITIC

I asked you what's the matter with you?

ACTOR

I am in a cab down there in the street waiting with beating heart, wondering whether she will give me the signal.

CRITIC

Oh, come now. You know she won't.

ACTRESS

[*Comes in, left.*]
It's six o'clock. You'll miss your train.

ACTOR

No, I won't.

CRITIC

When does the train leave?

ACTOR

At half-past six. I have plenty of time.

CRITIC

Then it's about time to go.

ACTRESS

We'll ask Liesl if the cab has come.

ACTOR

No, I'm sure it's there. [*The clock strikes six.*]
Six o'clock—exactly six o'clock.

ACTRESS

Six o'clock—exactly six o'clock.

CRITIC

Six o'clock—exactly six o'clock.

[*The* ACTRESS *walks up to window and gives signal, left of piano.*]

ACTOR

[*Rises, gets coat and goes up to her.*]

Well, good-by, sweetheart. Take care of yourself and don't forget me.

ACTRESS

[*Turning from the window.*]

What is it?

ACTOR

[*Ironically.*]

I was bidding farewell to you, my dear. I said, "good-by, darling, take care of yourself and don't forget me."

ACTRESS

[*Coming down in front of piano.*]

You haven't forgotten anything?

ACTOR

No, I haven't.

ACTRESS

Well, good-by, you can go.

ACTOR

I am going, even without your kind permission.

ACTRESS

I didn't say it to offend you! But what else can I say, since you must go? I can't say "please don't go."

CRITIC

Children!

ACTOR

Is that all?

ACTRESS

[*Crosses, left.*]

Yes, yes—that's all.

ACTOR

Is that your farewell? Is that all you have to say to me at the last minute?

ACTRESS

Good heavens! You'll be back in three days. You're not going to Siberia, you know.

ACTOR

[*Comes down to her.*]

The journey to Olmutz may prove just as fatal as the journey to Siberia.

[*The* ACTRESS *looks at* CRITIC, *turns ironically and sits on sofa.*]

CRITIC

I think he's quite right. You don't even kiss him.

ACTOR

[*Turning to go.*]

No, thank you—I don't want it unless you think of it yourself.

ACTRESS

Come here, you fool!

ACTOR

[*In door.*]

I won't!

ACTRESS

Come here! I *want* to kiss you, you foolish boy.

ACTOR

[*Goes to her, pretends stupidity.*]

What is it you want?

ACTRESS

[*Holding up her cheek to him.*]

Well?

ACTOR

Oh, please!

ACTRESS

Kiss me!

ACTOR

Just as you like. [*Kisses her forehead.*] God bless you.

ACTRESS

Do you call that a kiss? Oh, very well.

ACTOR

Oh, for pity's sake!

ACTRESS

[*Goes to him and throws her arms about his neck and whispers with assumed passion.*]

You foolish boy—you child! [*They kiss.*] My darling!

ACTOR

[*Almost in tears.*]

Sweetheart—good-by—good-by.

ACTRESS

[*Follows him to door.*]

Good-by! Good-by!

CRITIC

Good luck to you.

[*Crosses to sofa, where he sits.* LIESL *drifts in from right upper door, crying.*]

ACTRESS

Liesl, tidy up the room a bit.

LIESL

Yes'm.

ACTRESS

Where's mama?

LIESL

In there.

ACTRESS

What's she doing?

LIESL

Washing the windows.

ACTRESS

Tell her to bring me my tea-gowns.

CRITIC

You know, I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that my fair hostess is interested in anything or anybody but my humble self. Of course, that's of no importance.

ACTRESS

If it's of no importance, why the irony?

CRITIC

Possibly I wanted to let you know how superfluous I am about here, but as I have been just as super-

fluous for the last eight years, and I'm still here, I don't see why I should go now. Unless, of course, you're expecting someone.

ACTRESS

Granted I'm expecting someone, how does that concern you?

CRITIC

Not at all. Don't imagine, madam, that I wish to set myself up as a chaperon—but, are you expecting someone?

ACTRESS

You are an old idiot!

CRITIC

You are nervous—you want to get rid of me, and because you see that I know it, you pretend to deny it. Your eyes are shining, you don't quite know what to say, you are much prettier than you were a half hour ago. What is it, Marie?

ACTRESS

You are a dear old idiot.

[*She embraces him.* MAMA *enters, left, with tea-gowns.*]

MAMA

Don't let me disturb you. Here are the tea-gowns. Don't misunderstand her when she kisses you. It

was the same in my day. When I kissed a man, it meant that I wanted to get rid of him.

CRITIC

Naturally.

MAMA

Shut up!

CRITIC

You know, there's something invincibly distinguished about you, Mama. If you should ever leave here, you must come and live with me.

MAMA

What cheek!

CRITIC

And keep house for me.

MAMA

[*Calling.*]

Liesl, get his hat.

[LIESL *runs in from left, and crosses to hall, right.*]

ACTRESS

Liesl, fix yourself up a bit.

MAMA

[*Showing* ACTRESS *two tea-gowns.*]

Well, which one? This one is torn.

ACTRESS

Let me see it. Why didn't you mend it?

MAMA

I'm a mama, not a seamstress. Washing windows all day. I'm sick and tired of it all.

ACTRESS

[*Takes the tea-gowns and exits, left.*]

Don't begin again. Please, please, Mama, my nerves are in a state!

MAMA

[*To* LIESL, *who comes to her with* CRITIC's *hat and cane.*]

Liesl, go and help Bebi.

[LIESL *hurries out, left, and* MAMA *turns to* CRITIC, *holding out his hat and cane to him.*]

Well, here's your hat!

CRITIC

What a charming creature you are, dear golden heart. I'll go when I'm ready.

MAMA

Oh, my!

[*She turns to piano and munches candy out of box.*]

CRITIC

[*Calling to* ACTRESS *offstage, left.*]
Are you going to the opera this evening?

ACTRESS

[*Offstage, left.*]
I don't know yet.

CRITIC

Have you got your seats?

ACTRESS

Yes. Krauss got me one of the court boxes.

CRITIC

That's nice. If you don't like the opera you can take a nap in the anteroom. That's what I do. Which one?

ACTRESS

First tier, right. Number four.

CRITIC

You're not sure you're going yet?

ACTRESS

No.

CRITIC

Why not?

ACTRESS

I'm expecting a caller. I don't know when I will be free. If it should be too late, I may not go at all.

CRITIC

It's easy enough to get rid of a caller if you don't want him to stay.

MAMA

Yes, it looks like it

CRITIC

[*Turning on her.*]
Hm, there's no doubt about it! None! None!

MAMA

No, no! What?

CRITIC

You are a charming creature. It's a pity I didn't meet you thirty years ago.

MAMA

[*Rises.*]
Well, it's too late now. Here's your hat.

CRITIC

You don't want me to go?

MAMA

[*Ironically.*]
Oh, no!

CRITIC

Well, I'll stay. [*Puts hat on piano.*] You'll probably go after all, won't you?

ACTRESS

Probably.

CRITIC

I expect to be there myself. I'll drop in and see you. May I?

ACTRESS

[*After hesitation.*]
Oh, yes. Do. That'll be awfully nice.

CRITIC

[*Rises.*]
You know, Mama, I'm getting awfully fond of you.

MAMA

Yes.

CRITIC

Yes, I'm going to do something for you.

MAMA

Yes.

CRITIC

I'm going to let you hand me my hat, yourself.

MAMA

Go to the devil!

[CRITIC *takes hat, turns left, and then swings right, and meets* MAMA's *glowering visage.*]

CRITIC

It's always very nice to see you.

MAMA

I wish I could say the same.

[CRITIC *saunters out, stopping at the door.*]

CRITIC

Take care of yourself, Mama. Petrified obelisk, we all need you.

[MAMA *gets herself a drink from cabinet, eats chocolate, then looks at* ACTRESS's *picture and sits crying on sofa.* LIESL *enters, left.*]

LIESL

What's the matter?

MAMA

I'm crying because I love Bebi so much. I can't control myself. I'm so happy.

LIESL

What's the matter?

MAMA

Didn't I tell you to say ma'am to me?

LIESL

Yes, ma'am.

MAMA

She's in love with someone—but don't give it away or I'll land you one you won't forget. She's in love with someone.

LIESL

Yes, ma'am. Not her husband?

MAMA

Someone else, you fool! Oh, what she has endured with this man—but, thank the Lord, she is alive again, she breathes again!

LIESL

How do you know?

MAMA

I know her better than her mother could. I'm her mama. I can tell by the way she walks, by something in her eye, that she is beginning to think about someone. I know my darling and don't you say I don't. I'm her mama, her loving mama!

LIESL

And her with such a handsome husband!

MAMA

That's right. Try to hide it. I know that you are in love with him. I can see without my lorgnette. Now don't deny it, Liesl. You ought to be ashamed of yourself—having such thoughts, in a respectable house like this, before my daughter!

ACTRESS

[*Enters, left.*]

Liesl, I shall want some tea. In tall glasses. Fix yourself up a bit. Is my gown all right? How do you like my dress, Liesl?

MAMA

It's lovely! It's beautiful!

LIESL

It's lovely! [*Exits right to kitchen.*]

MAMA

Oh, this is crooked here!

[*Kneels to fix train of* ACTRESS's *tea-gown.*]

ACTRESS

No, no—it's meant to be like that!

MAMA

Oh, you are beautiful! You are superb, you are magnificent!

ACTRESS

I can't help being beautiful, can I, Mama?

MAMA

And you are quite right, my child. A woman's got only one life to live and when it's with her husband— [*Searches for phrase.*] A regular petrified obelisk. [*She beams at* ACTRESS.]

ACTRESS

Mama.

MAMA

Yes, dearie.

ACTRESS

You don't like my husband.

MAMA

What do you expect of me? I'm to like the villain who robs me of my daily bread!

ACTRESS

What?

MAMA

In the old days, when your real gentlemen friends used to come here, what with this and that, I could

afford—well, I could afford to keep up my social position.

ACTRESS

Mama!

MAMA

I used to chaperon you and see something of the social world I've been used to. It's not like what I was used to. My heart cracks when I think of it.

ACTRESS

All right, Mama. Control yourself. You shall have your social position again tonight.

MAMA

What, dearie?

ACTRESS

Instead of scrubbing the kitchen floors, you shall go with me to the opera.

MAMA

[*Delighted.*]

Oh, you darling! Didn't I say that you're alive again. [*She goes to inner room, left.*] Bebi's nice to me because she's going to be nice to herself.

[*The* ACTRESS, *left alone in the dimly lighted room, sits on the sofa, takes up a hand mirror lying on the piano back of her and looks at herself in it. Then she lights a bulb in the*

piano lamp, and goes to the switch at the door, left, and turns it. The wall brackets, left, are lit, but they are too strong for her and she switches them off again. Then she returns to the sofa, sits and puts on another light in the piano lamp. Now the light is right for her and she goes to the piano and plays her Chopin Nocturne. In the middle of it, she stops to look at herself again in the mirror, puts it down and resumes playing at exactly the place where she interrupted herself. The doorbell rings and LIESL *rushes in excitedly with a card. The* ACTRESS *looks at it without stopping the Chopin.*]

ACTRESS

[*Reading card.*]
Who is it?

LIESL

A General.

ACTRESS

Show him in.

[LIESL *goes out and shows in the husband disguised as a Cossack Prince.*]

GUARDSMAN

[*He speaks with a strong Russian accent.*]

Prodidje, pojalesta.

[ACTRESS *stops playing.*]

ACTRESS

Delighted. I appreciate the honor.

GUARDSMAN

I am Wassily Samsonov. [*He kisses her hand.*]

ACTRESS

Charmed. Won't you sit down?

GUARDSMAN

I must beg a thousand pardons for seeking your personal acquaintance in this gauche fashion.

ACTRESS

Gauche? Not at all. I wrote you I wanted to meet you. You have no need for excuses.

GUARDSMAN

I am so glad you are not angry with me.

ACTRESS

I am an actress. I live for my public. I avail myself of the freedom permitted by my profession which spares us so many conventional stupidities—gaucheries. [*Sits sofa.*]

GUARDSMAN

I am terribly happy. [*Kisses her hand.*] I was very afraid.

ACTRESS

I hope you are gradually recovering.

GUARDSMAN

Some, not many minutes, and I will feel good to make the correct thing alone with the great artist—the truly great artist so honored and esteemed—[*They laugh embarrassedly.*] Please to pardon my childish embarrassment, but we soldiers still take our illusions with us to the theater.

ACTRESS

I hope that you will lose none of your illusions now that we have met.

GUARDSMAN

Quite the contrary.

ACTRESS

Yes. I feel that, too. Quite the contrary. Will you have some tea? It's so Russian.

GUARDSMAN

Merci.

ACTRESS

Oui merci ou non merci?

GUARDSMAN

You speak French charmingly.

ACTRESS

[*Very pleased.*]

Merci, de tout, de tout, de tout. Sit here. [*He crosses and sits, right.*] How many lumps?

GUARDSMAN

One.

ACTRESS

One.

GUARDSMAN

One.

ACTRESS

You take only one lump of sugar with your tea?

GUARDSMAN

I think it is not manly to care for the sweets.

ACTRESS

My husband takes four lumps.

GUARDSMAN

Even without sugar the lot of the husband is sweet. [*He rises and bows.*]

ACTRESS

You emphasize the word "husband" so oddly.

GUARDSMAN

I do not take husbands too seriously.

ACTRESS

How like you aristocrats. You are all alike. We simple folk often find our truest happiness in marriage.

GUARDSMAN

Forgive me! I would be sorry if there is anything in what I have said to offend you.

ACTRESS

You are forgiven. [*She hands him a glass of tea.*]

GUARDSMAN

Many thanks.

ACTRESS

[*With a smile.*]

Oh!

[*There is a silence.*]

GUARDSMAN

[*Sits again.*]

When I had the pleasure of coming in here, you were playing Chopin, n'est ce pas?

ACTRESS

I was. Do you like Chopin?

GUARDSMAN

Ah, yes. He write so soft, so melancholicky.

ACTRESS

I like him, too. [*Stirring.*] You know—Chopin's music is autumnal. When the year is dying and the last fragrance of the garden floats in at the open window—when the sun is setting—then Chopin's weeping music touches the heart. [*She drinks.*]

GUARDSMAN

Da! Da! [*They drink.*]

ACTRESS

But now that it's spring, and the beginning of things——

GUARDSMAN

[*Stops drinking and rises.*]

Pardon!

ACTRESS

Don't you think some other music would be more suitable? I really don't know how I came to be playing Chopin. [*She sighs.*]

GUARDSMAN

[*Goes up, left of her.*]
You are sighing.

ACTRESS

It meant nothing.

GUARDSMAN

You artists have such a profound—soul life.

ACTRESS

Some of us have. How old are you?

GUARDSMAN

Thirty-two.

ACTRESS

Thirty-two! How young!

GUARDSMAN

Do I look more old?

ACTRESS

Oh, no! No!

GUARDSMAN

Your husband is not here, no!

ACTRESS

No!

GUARDSMAN

I see by the paper your distinguished husband is starring in Olmutz.

ACTRESS

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

I very much regret deeply that this opportunity of making your acquaintance—for which I am eternally grateful to you and to your gracious—how do you say—non habituel——

ACTRESS

Unconventionality?

GUARDSMAN

[*Kisses her hand.*]

Merci! Thank you. What I meant was I regret that I must put in the pocket for the time being the pleasure of meeting your gifted husband. I am really a great admirer of his art.

ACTRESS

Oh, are you!

GUARDSMAN

[*With fervor.*]

Oh, yes! He impersonates with such genius, such incomparable genius the—the higher life of the soul.

ACTRESS

Oh, yes!

GUARDSMAN

Yes.

ACTRESS

[*Squeezing lemon in glass viciously.*]

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

Yes.

TOGETHER

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

Yes, but as you say, Chopin's music is not the music for the spring.

ACTRESS

No. [*Puts cup down.*]

GUARDSMAN

No. Chopin is renunciation and spring is love.

ACTRESS

Love! You see you cannot talk to an actress for five minutes without mentioning the word love.

GUARDSMAN

Pardon! That was not meant for the actress.

ACTRESS

For whom then?

GUARDSMAN

For the very charmingly beautiful woman.
[*He rises and bows. Kisses both hands.*]

ACTRESS

You are making love to me already.

GUARDSMAN

May I say I am happy you have recognized it.

ACTRESS

I have recognized it all the more quickly because I do not feel altogether free of blame, myself.

GUARDSMAN

If there is any blame, I will take it all upon myself.

ACTRESS

Oh, no! I permitted you to come here under these peculiar circumstances, I cannot allow you to take the entire blame upon yourself.

GUARDSMAN

Do you regret it?

ACTRESS

No!

GUARDSMAN

Then I may hope for the opposite of regret.

ACTRESS

Perhaps!

GUARDSMAN

With one little word you have make me happy.
[*He approaches her.*]

ACTRESS

Do you smoke? These are not very good cigarettes. My husband doesn't care for anything better.

GUARDSMAN

[*Emphatically.*]
These are very good cigarettes. With a single word, you have make me very happy—a lonely soldier, who all his life has avoid women.

ACTRESS

Don't, don't take what I said so seriously.

GUARDSMAN

It is not what you say but my heart, he tell me——

ACTRESS

Do not trust your heart too seriously.

GUARDSMAN

You destroy my little hope.

ACTRESS

I object to the word "hope."

GUARDSMAN

Please do not hurt me so. [*He sits and buries head.*] Vocnoyu Taspe von.

ACTRESS

I beg your pardon.

GUARDSMAN

Vocnogu Bosje moy. [*Crosses to right.*]

ACTRESS

Are you angry with me?

GUARDSMAN

No, no! I had better go. My feeling may carry me too far.

ACTRESS

Then this is farewell.

GUARDSMAN

After what I have done, what can it be but farewell?

ACTRESS

No, no, no! I'm going to the opera tonight. Won't you call on me in my box?

GUARDSMAN

Yes, I will take the liberty of calling.

ACTRESS

We can continue our conversation in the anteroom.

GUARDSMAN

My sincere thanks. Especially for the anteroom.

ACTRESS

I object to your thanks—and the misunderstanding, and forgive you both. [*He kisses her hand and leaves her hastily. She goes to piano and is about to play as* CURTAIN FALLS.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

Setting by Jo Mielziner

Photo by Francis Bruguiere

ACT II OF THE THEATER GUILD PRODUCTION.

ACT II

SCENE: *The anteroom of a royal box at the opera. The first act of "Madame Butterfly" is in progress.*

The set is triangular, with the entrance to the box proper about center in the longest side of the angle presented to the audience. The swinging doors of the box proper are shut at the rise of the curtain. The entrance from the foyer is right through swinging doors. After a few bars of music, the USHER *enters, and holds the door open for* MAMA *and the* ACTRESS *to enter.* MAMA *is elegantly and highly ornamented with false blonde curls and make-up. The* ACTRESS *carries the red roses from Act One. The box is furnished in dark red and gold.*

USHER

This way, please!

ACTRESS

Oh, we're late!

USHER

Yes, the first act's already begun.

ACTRESS

Good house?

USHER

Sold out. Beg pardon, would you like a program—or shall I get you an opera glass?

ACTRESS

No, thank you. Tell me, aren't you Mrs. Spengler?

USHER

Yes, madam. And the dear kind lady still remembers me?

ACTRESS

Of course I do! How is your husband? Wasn't he our assistant property man?

USHER

Yes, dear sweet lady.

ACTRESS

He's been pensioned, hasn't he?

USHER

Yes, dear, sweet lady, since November last. Oh, you're so beautiful tonight, madam!

[MAMA *gets coins from bag.*]

ACTRESS

Really. [*Goes to box.*] Thank you Mama.

MAMA

Yes!

ACTRESS

Give Mrs. Spengler something!

[MAMA *rises and gives* USHER *coin, comes back to box.*]

ACTRESS

[*Seated in box.*]

Whom are you bowing to?

MAMA

[*Loudly.*]

Count von Hochhausen. He bowed first.

ACTRESS

Where is he?

MAMA

Second box from the stage.

ACTRESS

Yes, yes! How do you do. [*She bows. They both sit looking down at the supposed audience through their opera glasses.*]

MAMA

There's Dr. Feldman, twelfth row, orchestra, left side. He just bowed.

ACTRESS

I see him. [*Bows.*] How do you do? Where's Altenbacher? I can't find him!

MAMA

He must be there. He's never missing. Oh, there he is in his usual place, hidden behind Tilly Braunschweig. She's so fat you can't see him.

ACTRESS

Oh, yes! [*Bows.*] Bow nicely to him, Mama!

MAMA

[*Bows very cordially.*] Go to hell!

ACTRESS

Why, Mama!

MAMA

He can't hear it.

ACTRESS

But he can see it in your face.

MAMA

I don't care. Oh, there's Dr. Hirschler with

all the children. My dear, there's going to be another. The girls are waving to you.

ACTRESS

How do, girls? [*Waves her hand, then bows more ceremoniously.*]

MAMA

Who are you bowing to now?

ACTRESS

That's the banker March. You don't know him, Mama. He was a friend of mine at the time when you——

MAMA

[*Waspish.*]

Why don't you say it?—when I was——

ACTRESS

[*Interrupting.*]

If you're going to be nasty, Mama, I'll send you home.

MAMA

[*Elaborately sweet.*]

I beg your pardon.

USHER

A gentleman asks if he may see you.

ACTRESS

Oh, oh, certainly, show him in. [USHER *exits. To* MAMA.] Mama, is my nose shiny?

MAMA

[*Powders* ACTRESS's *nose.*]
Bebi, bebi.

ACTRESS

Now, Mama, be as elegant as you can.

MAMA

[*Blows her nose.*]
Yes, I will. [*The* GUARDSMAN *enters.*]

GUARDSMAN

Madame!

ACTRESS

Ah, you, how good of you to come!

GUARDSMAN

Thank you.

ACTRESS

Mama! [MAMA *comes down center a bit.*] May I present, Prince Wassily Samsonov, my Mama?

GUARDSMAN

[*To* USHER *after bowing to* MAMA. MAMA *and* ACTRESS *whisper.*]

If you will be hearing about my chauffeur coming, will you let me know?

USHER

Yes, Your Highness.

MAMA

[*Aside to* USHER.]

Mrs. Spengler, if anybody should be looking for the Count or for my daughter——

USHER

Yes, ma'am, I understand.

MAMA

You may go now.

USHER

Yes, ma'am. [*Does not move.*]

GUARDSMAN

[*To the* ACTRESS.]

It's absolute slavery. I'm not my own master for one hour together. I must show myself to my ambassador. There's a ball at the Palace tonight, and I must go! [MAMA *comes down to the* USHER.]

MAMA

[*Takes some money from her bag, gives it to the* USHER.]

Here's a kronen for you.

USHER

Thank you. [*Goes out.*]

MAMA

[*Takes a notebook from her bag, rests it against the wall, wets the pencil and then writes, murmuring.*]

Usher, two kronen.

GUARDSMAN

[*Turning to her.*]

What are you writing, madame?

MAMA

Just a little—asperism that occurred to me.

GUARDSMAN

Can I hear?

MAMA

"Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand——"

GUARDSMAN

Quel esprit!

MAMA

No, it's Goethe.

GUARDSMAN

You visit with the opera often, I suppose.

MAMA

Not so much lately. I'm busy keeping house.

GUARDSMAN

Oh—then you make the housekeeping for your charming daughter.

MAMA

Yes. These artists you know. [*Crosses to* ACTRESS.] You good for nothing little genius.

GUARDSMAN

In this strange Bohemian existence this charming little house mama must be a great comfort.

ACTRESS

Oh, yes, she's a great comfort.

GUARDSMAN

It is remarkable how much you resemble the mama.

ACTRESS

There, mama, does that please you?

MAMA

[*Aside to* ACTRESS.]

For what you give me, I even have to look like you— So you think we look alike, Prince. So many people have said it but there's them think she looks more like her father.

GUARDSMAN

What! You did know her father?

MAMA

[*Laughs loudly.*]

Upon my word, Prince? Listen to him, Marie. Know her father.

GUARDSMAN

DA. DA. DA. That was humoristic—I thought you meant—his father—I mean—then your husband lives here?

MAMA

[*Turning to tears.*]

He's dead. It cracks my heart when I think of it.

ACTRESS

It cracks all our hearts, dear. Console yourself with the music.

MAMA

[*Turns to box and sits.*]

Yes, Bebi, I'm just crazy about the opera.

GUARDSMAN

Are you?

ACTRESS

[*Closes box doors.*]

You don't care for the opera?

GUARDSMAN

To tell true—no.

[*The door is closed.*]

ACTRESS

Then the honor of this visit is due entirely to me. You don't care for music at all. I thought this afternoon you were fond of Chopin.

GUARDSMAN

[*Advances to her.*]

But now there is something else which interests me infinitely more.

ACTRESS

What can that be?

GUARDSMAN

[*Takes her hand.*]

Do not ask *what* but *who.*

ACTRESS

Curious——

GUARDSMAN

What is curious?

ACTRESS

And how sad.

GUARDSMAN

Sad?

ACTRESS

Life, life—is sad. You, see, Prince, we've known each other only since six o'clock this afternoon—and yet it is already necessary to make certain matters clear——

GUARDSMAN

I am very sorry if there is anything in what I have said——

ACTRESS

No, no. You misconstrue my words. I do not object to your saying nice things to me—a woman—an actress needs that sort of thing—yes, she needs it. I confess I need it as the field needs the rain.

GUARDSMAN

Well, then.

ACTRESS

But you are so revoltingly sure of the outcome. Such assurance, as far as I am concerned, is quite misplaced. I do not like it!

GUARDSMAN

Pardon.

ACTRESS

[*Turns to him again.*]

And now all is clear between us, is it not? I do not mind your making love to me but you must not do it with so definite a purpose. And there is one other little thing that you must remember. [*Goes to left.*] I am a married woman. I have a husband. And I love my husband.

GUARDSMAN

Do you—do you——

ACTRESS

Why does this prosaic confession excite you?

GUARDSMAN

It excites me—it excites me very much, it excite me because everything about you excite me. You believe when I tell you that I came to you with all possible esteem and respect, you believe it, yes?

ACTRESS

[*Sits.*]

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

You believe it because I say it, because I write it, and because you think that I am a gentleman?

ACTRESS

Because I know you are a gentleman.

GUARDSMAN

[*Goes to her.*]

Da, a gentleman, but I am also a very strong man, a soldier, and do you believe that I can stand so near to you, a woman with so warm blood and so pulsing nerve, and feel respect and esteem only? Is it possible?

ACTRESS

No, no.

GUARDSMAN

Then, if you think there is some other feeling beside esteem and respect—do you permit me to give it a name?

ACTRESS

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

[*Retreats.*]

Have you consider carefully?

ACTRESS

If you give me time to think it over, then I may not allow it.

GUARDSMAN

Well, then I will give you time to think it over.

[*He is about to sit right, when she speaks.*]

ACTRESS

I have thought it over. Yes. You may say it.

GUARDSMAN

Then you permit it. Then I will tell you. This other feeling is love. [*She leans toward him. He retreats.*] But I respect what you have say. I respect the fact that you are in love with your husband.

ACTRESS

I did not say that.

GUARDSMAN

You did say it.

ACTRESS

No, I did not. I said that I love my husband and between loving and being in love there is a wider gulf than between not loving and being in love.

GUARDSMAN

Well, that make me very—that make me very happy.

ACTRESS

That pleases you.

GUARDSMAN

Oh, yes, but I think it is your husband who has little reason to be happy.

ACTRESS

Perhaps.

GUARDSMAN

But I hear that when you marry him, you marry for love.

ACTRESS

Yes, but it was his love—although—God knows——

GUARDSMAN

What does God know?

ACTRESS

God knows everything.

GUARDSMAN

Yes. I have seen your husband often on the stage. A very handsome man.

ACTRESS

Yes. He is handsome.

GUARDSMAN

One might say he was incomparably handsome.

ACTRESS

[*Indifferently.*]

Many women admire him.

GUARDSMAN

And you do not?

ACTRESS

Oh, yes, I admire him, not only because he is handsome but because he is an intelligent man as well——

GUARDSMAN

Da. Da.

ACTRESS

Which is very rare among actors. They are all so conceited.

GUARDSMAN

Da! He is intelligent.

ACTRESS

Yes.

GUARDSMAN

One might call him a very intelligent man.

ACTRESS

I wouldn't go as far as that. A good actor and an intelligent man—that might be; but a *very* intelligent man—who would make up his face, wear a wig, and recite memorized lines—no, that's not very plausible.

GUARDSMAN

Then you despise actors.

ACTRESS

I do not despise actors at all. Only I don't like it when my husband—oh, well, we won't bother about that. I make the best of it.

[*Turns up center.*]

GUARDSMAN

That mean that you are happy?

ACTRESS

Not happy.

GUARDSMAN

Strange. When I look at you with the eye of the audience, I can hardly imagine a very more happy people, having fame together, hearing the storm of applause together, tasting the sweets of triumph together—oh, that must be very intoxicating.

ACTRESS

And then, night after night, to go home to the same old supper. Oh, yes, that's very intoxicating.

GUARDSMAN

I cannot imagine your husband talking this way.

ACTRESS

No?

GUARDSMAN

I am sure it give him the greatest joy to act with you, and have supper with you.

ACTRESS

I hardly believe my husband gets any particular thrill out of having supper with me.

GUARDSMAN

How different men are! You imagine that your husband could find it dull to have supper with you. But, madame, have you ever perhaps imagined that it might not be so dull for you, if you perhaps, have supper with someone else?

ACTRESS

If I—you mean——

GUARDSMAN

May I—may I speak free?

ACTRESS

As freely as you like.

GUARDSMAN

[*Bending low.*]

I mean have you ever thought that you might sometime—sometime deceive your husband?

ACTRESS

[*She rises, goes grandly to box.*]

Mama.

[*He takes cloak up, murmuring, "I knew it, I knew it," and is about to go when the* ACTRESS *returns.*]

ACTRESS

Do you know, Prince, why I have come back?

GUARDSMAN

Why?

ACTRESS

Because I felt that I had been a little too harsh with you.

GUARDSMAN

No. No.

[*The* ACTRESS *is surprised.*]

Well, maybe so.

ACTRESS

And a little unjust. I should not have left you in such an insulting fashion. After all, I was to blame. I should never have allowed you to ask this —this terrible question.

GUARDSMAN

Yes—yes. But you gave me the very good answer.

ACTRESS

Not yet.

GUARDSMAN

[*Horrified. Retreats, left.*]

No, no. What! When you went away from me so quick! With no word!

ACTRESS

I didn't mean to hurt you. I should have said to you as calmly, as honestly as I now say it, that I could never, never, never deceive my husband. I beg your pardon for it.

GUARDSMAN

For being true to him.

ACTRESS

No—for not telling you at once.

GUARDSMAN

So, now the time has come—I will make the confession myself. I have never in all my life love any woman but you. I tell you this because you must know what sort of man I am, and I give you my best word of honor that I stand before you just so pure as you stand before me.

ACTRESS

It means so much to you.

GUARDSMAN

Forgive me if, a moment ago, I thought it might be otherwise. But now I lay my broken hopes humbly at your feet.

ACTRESS

You will find consolation.

GUARDSMAN

A woman always say that.

ACTRESS

My poor friend.

GUARDSMAN

Permit me to kiss your hand.

ACTRESS

My dear friend

GUARDSMAN

[*About to throw off his disguise.*]

Now it is no longer necessary for me to disguise my love. [*There is a knocking at the door, right.*]

ACTRESS

Someone is knocking.

GUARDSMAN

Yes.

[*The* CRITIC *comes in.*]

CRITIC

[*At door.*]

May I?

ACTRESS

[*Assenting.*]

Oh, Bernhard.

[CRITIC *crosses to* ACTRESS *and kisses hand.*]

CRITIC

Are you enjoying the opera?

[*He stands to right of her, between her and* GUARDSMAN.]

ACTRESS

May I introduce Prince Wassily Samsonov? My old friend, Dr. Bernhard.

GUARDSMAN

[*In pretended awe.*]

Dr. Bernhard, the critic.

ACTRESS

Yes, this is he.

GUARDSMAN

I always read what you write.

CRITIC

Thanks. And indeed— Yes, indeed, if I am not mistaken—and I do not think that I am mistaken—it seems to me that I have already had the pleasure of meeting the Prince.

ACTRESS

Oh, really!

CRITIC

[*Crosses to* GUARDSMAN.]

Yes, yes, I wouldn't want to be too sure about it, but it does seem to me as if we have met somewhere.

GUARDSMAN

Maybe so.

CRITIC

Yes, I know we met at the home of a very beautiful woman, not so very long ago.

GUARDSMAN

Oh, did we?

CRITIC

In the home of a very beautiful woman, with whom you were doubtless more successful than I.

GUARDSMAN

Oh!

CRITIC

Don't be so modest.

GUARDSMAN

Things are not always just what they look at.

CRITIC

Nothing is settled as yet. The affair is—nothing is decided.

GUARDSMAN

No.

ACTRESS

Oh, have you many such undecided affairs?

GUARDSMAN

No, no.

CRITIC

Come, now this one affair does exist.

ACTRESS

Affairs?

GUARDSMAN

Da-da. This one—this single little one.

ACTRESS

Then there is one.

GUARDSMAN

Huren. What does it matter?

ACTRESS

[*Outraged.*]

What does it matter? What does it matter? You really don't suppose that I'm interested in your love affairs. You really don't dare to assume that I—oh——

[*She breaks off and goes into box.*]

GUARDSMAN

I'm the happiest man in the world.

CRITIC

She hasn't recognized you.

GUARDSMAN

Can anyone recognize me?

CRITIC

I did.

GUARDSMAN

No, no. She hasn't recognized me. If she has, that would be terrible, then everything I have done would be useless. Oh, no, she hasn't a suspicion. Why, she said things to me that she's never said before.

CRITIC

Then everything is all right.

GUARDSMAN

You know once this afternoon I was frightened. I was afraid she wouldn't resist me—Samsonov, Samsonov. But now to see her conquer her feeling for me—Samsonov, Samsonov, to see her crush it—oh, that means more than just happiness, my friend, no, that means peace of mind.

CRITIC

She is true to you.

GUARDSMAN

True. There is no doubt of it, and a woman who can be true to her husband when I am the lover will be true always.

CRITIC

Congratulations. Excellent. Then you are sure.

GUARDSMAN

Sure, I'll prove it to you. I shall stop at nothing. I will make love to her so violently that she will throw me out of the box.

CRITIC

But——

GUARDSMAN

And then when she speaks those precious words, "Leave me forever," then off with my wig and mustache, and I will press my little one to me. [*Embraces* CRITIC, *who throws him off.*] And then, my friend, we will have a champagne supper, such as you have never had before.

CRITIC

I understand. Congratulations. Splendid. Splendid.

ACTRESS

[*Returns to anteroom.*]

Do you know, Bernhard, it is perfectly preposterous how conceited he is.

GUARDSMAN

I?

ACTRESS

Yes, you. A moment ago I happened to speak to you ironically about your affairs—and you

looked at me—with a look—as if you thought your shady love affairs could possibly mean anything to me.

GUARDSMAN

Have I suggest so?

ACTRESS

[*Excitedly.*]

Yes, I sit there, listen to the music and cannot hear a single note, because I am so ashamed of myself —not ashamed of myself but that you should have been able to make me so nervous. It's anything but pleasant. You surely don't believe that I am interested in your affairs with other women.

GUARDSMAN

I do believe it, and I believe so strong that I would give everything in the world for one look from your eye.

ACTRESS

Well, Bernhard, what do you say to my conquest? It's rather nice, isn't it?

CRITIC

Well, what do you expect, when you are the lady?

GUARDSMAN

I have been most correct in my behavior so far

and therefore the presence of this doctor—doctor——

ACTRESS

Dr. Bernhard.

GUARDSMAN

Dr. Bernhard will not prevent me from saying before him as a witness that there is nothing I would not do, no woman, no carrière, no happiness whatever that would not be absolutely nothing to me if you—if you——

[*He kneels, the* ACTRESS *goes to him.*]

ACTRESS

If I——?

GUARDSMAN

You know what—I would say.

ACTRESS

I know, I know. But I want to hear you say it.

GUARDSMAN

Hear what? What do you want to hear?

ACTRESS

I want to hear the end of that long sentence—that there is no woman in the world—oh, what do I want to hear! I want to hear you say you love me.

GUARDSMAN

[*Almost reels against the side of the anteroom.*] Oh, dear God.

ACTRESS

Say it. We may never see each other again. Why are you staring at my old friend like that? [*Turns to the* CRITIC *at whom the husband had been staring.*] Do you care for me?

CRITIC

Surely—surely.

ACTRESS

[*Nestling against him.*]

You are my best friend, my one friend in all the world, my father, my mother, my brother. I have never had a secret from you, and I have none now. Even if there were anything between us—but—but there is not and I hope you know it——

GUARDSMAN

No, no.

ACTRESS

—even if there were I would tell him . . . I would confess to him as I have been confessing to the poor fellow for eight years.

[*Buries head.*]

CRITIC

[*Indignant.*]

Oh, see here now . . . you little cat.

ACTRESS

[*Very stubborn.*]

I don't care. . . . You can believe whatever you like. This man, whom I met the first time at six o'clock this afternoon . . . dares . . . just because . . . because he misconstrued a word, a gesture of mine and believed me jealous—and that's what annoys me—what tortures me—and I would—I would like — [*Drops the* CRITIC's *hand, speaks in another tone.*] What do you say, Bernhard? I'm behaving very badly, aren't I? But I don't care about anything now; this man may believe what he likes—but I confess to you, Bernhard that—dear Bernhard—this man, this man——

GUARDSMAN

Oh, please, I beg of you——

CRITIC

How dare you interrupt the lady when she is honoring me with her confidence?

GUARDSMAN

Marie.

CRITIC

How dare you call the lady by her first name?

GUARDSMAN

How dare you speak to me so?

CRITIC

[*Turns and bows to him.*]

I am at your service, but I cannot allow you to interrupt me now.

[*Returns to her and puts his arm about her.*]

ACTRESS

Bernhard, he doesn't understand. Bernhard—look at him. He is no beauty—but at last—at last a man who has no ringing voice, a man who, thank God, is neither intelligent, nor brilliant—nor melancholy, nor sentimental—a man whose brain is neither sentimental nor perverse. Bernhard, this simple, honest, stupid—he comes here and he doesn't know how to behave—but, dear old friend—at last—after all these years—at last a MAN.

[*She breaks down and goes to box.*]

CRITIC

Yes. Control yourself. Congratulations.

GUARDSMAN

Then I will——

CRITIC

You will do nothing but behave like a man; and you will, I hope, appreciate the frankness of this lady, this genius whose conduct is not to be measured— [*He breaks off this strain when* ACTRESS *has reëntered box.*] It looks bad, my friend, she's in love with you. I am afraid that our little champagne supper is——

GUARDSMAN

Go away. Go away.

CRITIC

You have my sympathy, poor fellow.

GUARDSMAN

Go away.

CRITIC

I know. You are afraid she will fall on your neck, in my presence. But if I do go, something worse may happen. You will not be able to control yourself—you will seduce your own wife.

GUARDSMAN

Go away.

CRITIC

You have caught yourself in your own trap. Don't deceive yourself. But——

GUARDSMAN

What?

CRITIC

If you behave awkwardly or stupidly to disillusion her you will be a coward. If you should tell her who you are now how will you ever know? You've got to see it through.

GUARDSMAN

Yes, I'll see it through.

CRITIC

How?

GUARDSMAN

I will ask her if I may come tomorrow afternoon at five. Then I will know.

CRITIC

Too late. Your wife is deceiving you before your very eyes.

GUARDSMAN

She's only intending to deceive me. She'll not deceive me until tomorrow.

CRITIC

Poor fellow.

GUARDSMAN

Pity the husband but congratulate me.

CRITIC

You.

GUARDSMAN

If she kisses me as she has never kissed me, maybe it will not be the deceived husband her kiss awakens but—God forgive me—the victorious soldier. . . . No, no, come in tomorrow at four.

[CRITIC *exits into box as* ACTRESS *comes out again.*]

ACTRESS

Prince, do you realize what life has done to us? As for me, I shall do what I must do, but do you realize that you have acted like a school-boy? Men have killed themselves for me. But no man has ever forced me to say the things I have just said to you. I do not know what is happening to me. You do not know what is happening to you.

GUARDSMAN

No, you do not know what is happening to me.

ACTRESS

But now——

[*Gets closer.*]

GUARDSMAN

Now.

ACTRESS

Now.

GUARDSMAN

But now.

ACTRESS

Well, say something, do something, be something.

GUARDSMAN

Be what, be what?

ACTRESS

You.

GUARDSMAN

Me?

ACTRESS

What is the matter? You were so ardent, so eager a moment ago and now, why are you awkward, stupid——

GUARDSMAN

You said yourself that I was stupid.

ACTRESS

Are you playing a game with me; are you afraid to find this turning into a serious affair? There will be no divorce—no scandal—I do not intend to become a princess.

GUARDSMAN

Madame——.

ACTRESS

You should have known that I would burn with a great flame, once you set me alight.

[*He takes coat.*]

ACTRESS

And now you are afraid.

GUARDSMAN

I am mad. My happiness has turned my head. I do love you.

ACTRESS

You do love me.

GUARDSMAN

I love you. I adore you. I worship you.

ACTRESS

Are you as happy as I?

GUARDSMAN

Yes—I am unspeakably happy.

[*They kiss.*]

[*Applause is heard outside as the first act of the opera ends. The doors open.* MAMA *and the* CRITIC *see them together.* MAMA *gasps.*]

GUARDSMAN

[*Whispering to* ACTRESS.]
When shall I see you again?

BOTH TOGETHER

Tomorrow. Tomorrow at five.
[GUARDSMAN *goes out.*]

CRITIC

[*Coming to* ACTRESS.]
What a splendid finale.

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE: *The same drawing-room as in Act I.*

MAMA *and the* ACTRESS *sit in the settee, right.* MAMA *is darning socks. The* ACTRESS *is to the right of her.* LIESL *is under the piano, dusting.*

MAMA

I told you to say ma'am. Why don't you do as I told you? Each time I tell you.

LIESL

Yes, ma'am.

ACTRESS

[*Interrupting.*]

Liesl, Mama, I shall want tea for two in glasses, Russian tea.

LIESL

Yes, ma'am.

ACTRESS

If anyone should ask for me—I am not at home, —I have a headache, I'm not receiving, I'm not at home and I won't be back this afternoon.

LIESL

Yes, madam.

ACTRESS

Of course, if the Prince comes.

LIESL

The Prince?

ACTRESS

Yes.

MAMA

[*At the same time.*]

The Prince who was here yesterday, you fool, don't you know the Prince yet? And don't forget to call me ma'am.

LIESL

Yes.

MAMA

Je n'ai jamais vu dans toute ma vie un si beau et un si chic——

ACTRESS

Laissons ça, mama; ça va sans dire. Liesl, go and get tea ready. Russian.

LIESL

Yes, ma'am.

MAMA

[*Looking at* LIESL.]

Elle l'aime deja aussi.

ACTRESS

Pourquoi, aussi.

MAMA

Mais ma chere enfant, il ne faut pas que tu should try to hide it from your mama. I can still see without my lorgnette, Bebi, and your dear mama——

ACTRESS

That will do, Mama.

MAMA

[*She goes to piano and plays the Chopin Nocturne.*]

[*A pause.*]

MAMA

It's four o'clock—[*rises*]—and he won't be here until five; Bebi—I have still time to fix myself up a bit, because you never can tell, Bebi— [*Exits left. Bell rings.* MAMA *comes back muttering.*] Well, who can that be? Liesl's such a fool. If it's that Tillie Bergman and she wants to come in—she won't know how to keep her out. [*She goes out right to answer the door.* LIESL *enters with hand bag, and sets it center,* MAMA *enters with hand bag and sets it center, the concierge enters with trunk and sets it center. The* ACTOR *enters and stands on platform.* MAMA *exits left. As she goes off left.*]

Now he's back again, the next thing they'll be asking me to shine his *boots*.

ACTRESS

[*Stops playing.*]
Well—well—it's you.

ACTOR

[*Declaiming.*]
My coming then is unexpected?
My heart's hot impulse drove me to the deed.
For ancient Cyprus calls me, and I come.
The foe my sturdy fortress now doth threaten;
I come with faith and hope, high mounting;
Yes, I come with all sweet—

ACTRESS

Oh, for Heaven's sake, stop acting. What's brought you back so soon?

ACTOR

What's that? I return two whole days earlier, and all you have to say is "What's brought you back so soon?" Is that all your greeting? Your kiss, your embrace?

ACTRESS

You've been gone only one day and I was just be-

ginning to forget your sarcasm and your nagging. But now it's beginning all over again.

ACTOR

If you want me to, I can go back to Olmutz.

ACTRESS

[*Crosses down and sits sofa left.*]

Don't, don't! You are perfectly horrid.

ACTOR

That sounds more natural. When you speak to me so beautifully, so affectionately—I'll go of my own free will.

[*Gets bag.*]

ACTRESS

Well, obviously I'm curious to know why you've played only one of your three performances in Olmutz.

ACTOR

It's perfectly simple, my dear. This morning I received a telegram from our own theater saying that Krauss was ill and that if he was not better by night, they would put on Hamlet. You know perfectly well that when Krauss is ill in the morning, he is never quite himself by night, and that when I play Hamlet, there isn't even standing room—naturally——

ACTRESS

[*Crosses left.*]

Thanks, thanks, that's enough. You can spare me the rest of the press notices.

ACTOR

Well—in short, here I am—with my sweet little wife.

ACTRESS

You're in a very good humor.

ACTOR

Aren't you?

ACTRESS

Oh, yes. I am in good humor too.

ACTOR

Very, well, then. I'm in good humor, you're in good humor, and everything is all right.

ACTRESS

Yes.

ACTOR

It's too late to go to the café.

ACTRESS

You're going to stay home?

ACTOR

Yes.

ACTRESS

Until it's time to go to the theater?

ACTOR

Yes.

ACTRESS

[*With a sigh.*]

Oh, very well.

[*She starts out left.*]

ACTOR

Where are you going?

ACTRESS

Nowhere in particular.

[*She is about to go.*]

ACTOR

[*Goes up left of piano.*]

Well, what did you do with yourself all last evening?

ACTRESS

Nothing.

ACTOR

Weren't you bored doing nothing?

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

You didn't go anywhere?

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

Weren't you going to the opera?

ACTRESS

Oh, yes. How silly of me. Of course I quite forgot. That's so. I did go.

ACTOR

Were you bored?

ACTRESS

So, so.

ACTOR

What was it?

ACTRESS

"Butterfly."

ACTOR

But I thought you liked it.

ACTRESS

I've heard it so many times.

ACTOR

Then you were bored.

ACTRESS

Hm! What is the matter with you?

ACTOR

Nothing, nothing. I suppose Bernhard dropped in during the evening as usual.

[*He sits on piano stool.*]

ACTRESS

Yes, he was there a little while.

ACTOR

Then you were alone most of the evening.

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

No.

ACTRESS

No, Mama was there.

ACTOR

Alone in the afternoon, alone in the evening. Nobody here?

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

Nobody at all.

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

You were all alone until evening.

ACTRESS

How queer you are. If I tell you that I was alone —I was alone.

ACTOR

Then you were alone here until you left for the theater?

ACTRESS

Let me see. Bernhard was here—you said good-by to him yourself. Then there was the man with the bill—but you were still here—of course.

ACTOR

There was no one else here?

ACTRESS

No one else? Wait a minute.

[*Thinks it over.*]

No.

ACTOR

I don't know but I thought the concierge said—what do I know—something about a soldier——

ACTRESS

Yes? If there was a soldier here it was probably Liesl's lover.

ACTOR

That may be—I thought it might have been some stranger . . . coming here.

ACTRESS

If there was a soldier here, he came to see Liesl. But we can ask her.

[*Turns to door.*]

ACTOR

Never mind that, my dear. I know Liesl. Not any too bright but with a word or two she'd confess the soldier came to see her——

ACTRESS

Would she?

ACTOR

Yes, she'd even swear to it.

ACTRESS

Why should she swear to it?

ACTOR

Because even if there had been a soldier here and perhaps he had come to see you—— [*She rises.*] I'm only joking, I'm only joking, our good loyal Liesl would know just what to say. [ACTRESS *moves towards door. The* ACTOR *stops her.*] Never mind calling her.

ACTRESS

And so, little by little your harmless questions have turned into a regular cross-examination. I was quite happy at first; I was quite touched; I thought you were interested in how I spent the evening—and now it appears that you have been suspecting me. And with a soldier! Very nice I must say.

ACTOR

O please——

ACTRESS

You must be out of your mind.

ACTOR

Please, please!

ACTRESS

This is really too much—I want to know at once what is back of all this about a soldier. I will call Mama and Liesl——

ACTOR

Mama will tell the same lies as Liesl, and Liesl will tell the same lies as Mama, and there I'll be with three women trying to outdo each other lying to me.

ACTRESS

And now I insist that you tell me what you mean.

ACTOR

I don't mean anything.

ACTRESS

You've got to tell me what is in your mind and who put that sort of thing into your head.

ACTOR

No one. But nevertheless yesterday afternoon after I had left—there was a soldier here.

ACTRESS

What has that got to do with me?

ACTOR

Just wait, my dear, you'll find out soon enough. Let's go, step by step, in chronological order. Let us say—there was a soldier here; let us take for granted that Liesl has tearfully confessed he came to see her. Only there are all sorts of soldiers.

ACTRESS

What are you driving at?

ACTOR

There are all sorts of soldiers. Big soldiers, and little soldiers, soldiers in red and soldiers in blue, soldiers in caps of fur, and soldiers in shining helmets.

ACTRESS

It's a *fireman*, it's a fireman. The firemen wear helmets. It wasn't even a soldier. So I am supposed to have deceived you—and with a fireman?

ACTOR

A fireman?

ACTRESS

How do I know? Let's ask Liesl.

[*She starts to the door left.*]

ACTOR

[*Stopping her right of piano.*]

Not you, my dear, I'll do it. I am curious to know whether she will guess that it was a fireman. [*He tries to open the door, up right. There is a little scream outside and he drags* LIESL *in by the hair.*] Oho, you've been listening, my girl——

LIESL

I was just coming in, sir——

ACTOR

[*Sadly.*]

Then you've been listening? Then you know it was a fireman? Quite right, my girl—you're a good, faithful servant, you'll grow old in this house. Keep on listening— [*He puts her out again.*] I'll knock before I open next time, so that you won't hurt your nose. [*Returns to center.*] So—it was the nightingale and not the lark; it was a fireman, and not a Guardsman.

ACTRESS

A Guardsman? A Guardsman? Now, what does that mean?

ACTOR

Nothing. You were alone here at home, then you dressed and went to the opera with Mama, box No. 4, first tier.

ACTRESS

I see. . . . I see. . . . So, you've paid someone ten gulden to spy on me.

ACTOR

Twenty gulden, possibly.

ACTRESS

Just throwing your money away. Very well, that was where we sat.

ACTOR

You didn't exactly sit in the box!

ACTRESS

Oh, didn't we?

ACTOR

No, you spent the greater part of the first act in the anteroom.

ACTRESS

Then you acknowledge openly that this is no mere questioning, but an inquisition?

ACTOR

If you wish—I will acknowledge it.

ACTRESS

And you expect me to answer your ridiculous questions?

ACTOR

Yes, I do.

ACTRESS

[*Sits sofa.*]

Very well, for once you'll be right. I will answer them. Let us begin.

ACTOR

[*Sitting on trunk.*]

Where did you say your seats were last night?

ACTRESS

First tier, box 4.

ACTOR

Right or left?

ACTRESS

Right.

ACTOR

Were you there before the opera began?

ACTRESS

No.

ACTOR

No, you came in during the first act.

ACTRESS

Yes.

ACTOR

And you took off your evening wrap.

ACTRESS

Oh, did I? What an extraordinary thing for me to do!

ACTOR

Yes, you took off your evening wrap, the one I gave you for your thirtieth birthday.

ACTRESS

The twenty-ninth.

ACTOR

Thirty.

ACTRESS

Twenty-nine.

ACTOR

Thirty.

ACTRESS

Twenty-nine.

ACTOR

Well, it doesn't matter.

ACTRESS

It does matter.

ACTOR

The twenty-ninth, then.

ACTRESS

That is better.

ACTOR

And a few minutes later an automobile drove up.

ACTRESS

That doesn't concern me.

ACTOR

An officer of the Russian Guards got out of the automobile. Isn't that so?

ACTRESS

I don't know—it might have been, how should I know?

ACTOR

The Guardsman hurried up to the first tier and went straight to your box.

ACTRESS

That may be.

ACTOR

He sent his card in to you.

ACTRESS

That is not true.

ACTOR

Mrs. Spengler, the usher, says that it is.

ACTRESS

Mrs. Spengler, the usher, is lying.

ACTOR

I'll send for her.

ACTRESS

Then she will repeat her lie here.

ACTOR

Well, but we don't need Mrs. Spengler—just listen a minute. At seventeen minutes of nine you intro-

duced Mama to the Guardsman who was there in your box.

ACTRESS

Did I?

ACTOR

Then Mama left you alone till the end of the act. Later dear Mama came in again, was startled and went hastily back to her seat. What startled Mama?

[MAMA *comes in from left.*]

ACTRESS

Here she is. She can tell you herself.

MAMA

Anything the matter?

ACTOR

Aha, Mama, now you think I'm going to question you as to whether there was anyone in the box yesterday and you will cover yourself with glory by lying to me one hundred and fifty times without stopping for breath. Isn't that right, dearest Mama? [MAMA *crosses to him.*] But I shan't ask you a single question. You've been getting your ear greasy at the keyhole all for nothing. [*Chucks her chin.*] But wait a minute, I don't want you to go away without one little lie to your credit—tell me what startled you so.

MAMA

I suddenly thought of you.

[*Crosses to door, right.*]

ACTOR

Oh, oh, oh,—look out, Mama, don't open the door too suddenly, Liesl is listening at the keyhole.

MAMA

Thanks. [*Calling off.*] Look out, Liesl, I'm coming through.

[*She opens the door very carefully and goes out. There is a pause.*]

ACTOR

So Bernhard called on you in your box?

ACTRESS

Yes

ACTOR

Did you introduce him to someone?

ACTRESS

There was no one there to whom I could introduce him.

ACTOR

And suppose Bernhard were to come in at this moment?

ACTRESS

If there was no one in the box, then Bernhard will say there was no one there.

ACTOR

But if there was someone——?

ACTRESS

Then Bernhard will look at me first, and without so much as the quiver of an eyelash on my part, he will know that he is to say there was no one there.

ACTOR

Then, if Bernhard looks at you first—then there *was* someone there.

ACTRESS

He will look at me anyway as soon as he comes in —even before you ask him anything.

ACTOR

And if I go to meet him? If I question him when you are not there, how can he look at you then?

ACTRESS

Then he will have looked at me this morning.

ACTOR

And what if I questioned him last evening?

ACTRESS

Then he will have looked at me day before yesterday, and to spare yourself further trouble, he looked at me ten years ago, and ever since then, he has always known exactly what he was expected to say.

ACTOR

And if nevertheless he should come in here right now and say that there was a Guardsman in the box last night?

ACTRESS

Then I would know that you had told him just what to say.

ACTOR

I told him what to say! Oh, I see, then if he says anything *against* you, his testimony is worthless?

ACTRESS

If you think him capable of lying for my sake, I have perfect right to think him capable of lying for yours. Have you anything better to offer?

ACTOR

Yes.

ACTRESS

Then all this—all this is not merely a joke?

ACTOR

No—it is not a joke.

ACTRESS

And you really—seriously—thought that while you were slaving away, earning the money—that I was entertaining soldiers.

ACTOR

Oh, my dear—entertaining soldiers.

ACTRESS

That I—I who gave up her freedom, her whole life for your sake, that I should—while you were away, be entertaining soldiers.

ACTOR

I didn't say that you were entertaining soldiers.

ACTRESS

What did you say then? You said something much worse. And what are you doing now? You're thinking that I have deceived you.

ACTOR

Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't get so excited.

ACTRESS

And even if it were the truth, this lie—oh, I'm sure it was some of that Tillie Bergman's insinuations—even if it were true—how can you deny that I have given you my young and precious life?

[*Weeps.*]

ACTOR

But, my dear——

ACTRESS

[*Weeping.*]

How could you do that to me?

ACTOR

This is really——

ACTRESS

You're killing my very soul.

ACTOR

Oh, my dear—what nonsense——

ACTRESS

I can't stand it any longer—no—I feel that—that all is over between us.

ACTOR

[*Goes to her and sits right of her.*]

Don't say such things—you know how madly I love you.

ACTRESS

And yet you suspect me?

ACTOR

I do not suspect you.

ACTRESS

You believe lies about me.

ACTOR

No—no, I don't believe anything wrong about you.

ACTRESS

You're not saying that because you really believe —but only because you know that I won't stay with you a minute longer if you go on torturing me like this. I must go away.

ACTOR

[*Gets on knees.*]

I'm not torturing you, I promise you, my darling, that I will never torture you again. Don't go away.

ACTRESS

[*Rises.*]

I'm going away—I'm going away.

ACTOR

No! No! Don't go! Stay with me!

ACTRESS

Tell me as if you really meant it—from your very heart, that you do not believe these malicious lies.

ACTOR

I do not believe them.

ACTRESS

Did you say that with all your heart? You mean it honestly?

ACTOR

With all my heart—honestly.

ACTRESS

You love me and trust me?

ACTOR

I love you and trust you.

ACTRESS

It was all lies and slander.

ACTOR

It was all lies and slander.

ACTRESS

I was alone with Mama and I thought of your beautiful, ardent eyes—and I longed for you and wanted you with me—I loved you.

ACTOR

[*Buries face in her lap.*]
My darling.

ACTRESS

How I must love you to be able to forgive this. I do forgive you.

ACTOR

You are my one love, forever and ever.
[*A pause.*]

ACTRESS

And now tell me, who slandered me?

ACTOR

[*Bashfully.*]
I cannot tell you.

ACTRESS

Do you love me?

ACTOR

I love you.
[*Kisses her hand.*]

ACTRESS

And you believe in me?

ACTOR

I believe in you. [*She presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*] Forgive me—I'm so—so in love with you—that—why are you crying?

ACTRESS

Ah—if I could only tell you why I am crying——

[*She goes out right.*]

[ACTOR *remains on knees, then sits back on heels.*]

CRITIC

[*Enters, up right.*]

Well, it's tomorrow afternoon. What are you doing there?

ACTOR

Never mind.

CRITIC

What's the matter?

ACTOR

I'm believing that I wasn't with her last night.

CRITIC

What?

ACTOR

I'm believing what she said, that I wasn't with her last night.

CRITIC

[*Laughs.*]
Are you? Ho, ho.

ACTOR

Yes. And if I had confronted her with you, you would have lied, too.

CRITIC

Quite so.

ACTOR

I could prove nothing against her—unless I revealed myself to her——

CRITIC

Well, why didn't you?

ACTOR

Because I never realized before how much she loved me—if I had told her what I had done she never would have forgiven me. I was frightened—and so —well—there was nothing left for me to say but that I believed her.

CRITIC

Extraordinary——

ACTOR

Oh, please—what's so extraordinary about it? I just *said* I believed her. No disgrace about that!

CRITIC

Perhaps you're right—yes, my boy—perhaps after all you were really not there—perhaps that *is* the truth—is there anything you can't believe if it's necessary?

ACTOR

[*Rises.*]

Never mind about that. I've got control of myself now.

CRITIC

Have you? Well, what are you going to do now?

ACTOR

Yes. Now comes the moment when her lying is not going to help her any.

CRITIC

[*Coming down from platform.*]

That is the moment I don't want to miss.

ACTOR

No, that's a scene I can't play before an audience. Go away, go away. Come back later. Then we will all know.

CRITIC

Will we? What about our champagne supper?

[CRITIC *exits.*]

[ACTRESS *comes in from left with a smelling salts bottle in her hand. She is dressed in a different tea-gown.*]

ACTRESS

You're still here?

ACTOR

Why should I have gone away?

ACTRESS

[*Inhaling from the smelling salts bottle.*]

I thought I heard the door close— [*Pause.*] If you men only understood your wives—you'd go out now.

ACTOR

Are you expecting someone?

ACTRESS

[*Turns right.*]

What a funny question.

ACTOR

Then why should I go out?

ACTRESS

Do go out for a little while—go to the café—take a walk—even if only for half an hour. Can't you understand? After this dreadful scene I'm a wreck—I am so nervous.

ACTOR

You want to get rid of me?

ACTRESS

Yes.

ACTOR

Very well, my love. To show you how considerate I am of your nerves, and to show you I know you haven't put that on for me, I'll go.

ACTRESS

[*Becoming hysterical.*]

Oh, I see, I see. Then I'm expecting someone? The Guardsman possibly. I've given him a rendezvous! Here in my own apartment! [*Shouting.*] Will this never end?

ACTOR

Oh, don't begin that again. I'm going. I'll go just as soon as I've unpacked my things for tonight. [*She takes up a novel and lies back on the sofa to read it.*] That's right. Relax, relax. [*He*

kneels behind the open trunk, the top of which hides him from her and begins to change to the GUARDSMAN'S *costume and make-up.*] It's bad enough not to have been able to keep my engagement at Olmutz for Krauss's sake. For once they arrange the repertoire so that I have three evenings free and then it occurs to Krauss to get sick. I doubt if he's any sicker than I am.

ACTRESS

Probably not.

ACTOR

You know he's getting thirty-six thousand a year now.

ACTRESS

And yet he's up to his ears in debt.

ACTOR

Everything he owns is mortgaged. He's a card fiend.

ACTRESS

He loses a lot at the races, too.

ACTOR

Yes, the way he plunges it's no wonder he can't get along with thirty-six thousand a year. One ought to be able to live on that very decently.

ACTRESS

Not very luxuriously.

ACTOR

Why not? What can a bachelor like him need for rent? At most, four thousand.

ACTRESS

Four thousand.

ACTOR

Very well, that's four thousand.

ACTRESS

[*Very much bored.*]

Four thousand.

ACTOR

Then there's his clothes. What he needs for clothes, shoes, ties—on the stage and off—he ought to be able to get easily for eight hundred a month—that makes—[*he multiplies*]—nine thousand, six hundred a year, altogether sixteen thousand.

ACTRESS

[*As before.*]

Sixteen thousand.

[*Lies.*]

ACTOR

Then there is his underwear and linen, food, light and heat.

ACTRESS

Light and heat—yes——

ACTOR

On a liberal estimate——

ACTRESS

On a liberal estimate.

ACTOR

On a *very* liberal estimate, fourteen thousand, that makes thirty thousand. If we add six thousand for cigars alone, there's your thirty-six thousand. Where's the poverty in that?

[*He has taken wig and mustache from a box, smoothes, carefully, the wig.*]

ACTRESS

I didn't say anything about poverty . . . I said luxury.

ACTOR

One could live very well in the suburbs——

ACTRESS

Suburbs?

ACTOR

Don't sneer at the suburbs. It's only here that people are afraid of distances. In Berlin everybody

lives outside the town. It's only a matter of time before the city reaches the suburbs and the suburbs' got to go further out, and the city catches up to the suburbs again and then the suburbs' got to move out again. Why, it's perfectly delightful at Schoenbrunn. You can't call Schoenbrunn a suburb. It has such an aristocratic atmosphere. [*He is finished with his disguise and begins to assume the* GUARDSMAN'S *accent.*] The refined, dignified quiet atmosphere, the *court* and *court life* give the whole place a distinction. [*The clock strikes five and he rises from behind the trunk—the* GUARDSMAN *again. In Russian accent.*] Exactly five o'clock. His Majesty himself could not be more punctual.

[*The* ACTRESS *looks at him. There is a pause. Suddenly a smile brightens her face. She takes on the tone and manner which she had when with the* GUARDSMAN, *and speaks with artless ease.*]

ACTRESS

Good afternoon, Prince. [*She points to his former place.*] I began to think you were not coming.

ACTOR

Yes?

ACTRESS

How was the ball at the Palace last night? That

affected conversation must be terribly boring. Everything is so restrained. Were you there long?

ACTOR

[*In his own voice.*]
What are you talking about?

ACTRESS

What?

ACTOR

What's all this mean? Are you trying out a part —are you acting?

ACTRESS

[*Sitting up.*]
No, my dear, you are doing the acting. Why, you're even in costume.

ACTOR

Yes, I am, and I hope you realize why—instead of begging my forgiveness—now that you're exposed —instead of realizing that the moment has come when even your lies are of no avail—you are—you are—what does this mean? Doesn't *this* make everything clear?

[*Looks down at himself.*]

ACTRESS

Why, yes.

ACTOR

Well—then what are you doing?

ACTRESS

What am I doing? I'm going on with our little comedy from where we left off last night—the comedy that I've been playing for your sake since yesterday afternoon—if you wish we can keep it up—but I fancy we have had enough of it by now.

ACTOR

What are you saying?

ACTRESS

You heard me perfectly well.

ACTOR

You mean—you mean you've been acting—ever since yesterday afternoon?

ACTRESS

Yes.

ACTOR

And you mean to say— Great Heavens—you mean to say now—that you recognized me at once?

ACTRESS

I not only mean to say it—I do say it. And not only do I say it, but it is true.

ACTOR

Oh, that would be terrible, if at the moment that you are caught, you escape.

ACTRESS

[*Calmly.*]

You came in at that door yesterday at exactly 16 minutes past six. At seventeen minutes past six, I had recognized you. At eighteen minutes past six, I was wondering whether I should laugh in your face—and at nineteen minutes past six I had decided to play the comedy to the end.

ACTOR

That is not true.

ACTRESS

You poor fellow—you trust yourself to play a difficult part sufficiently well to deceive even me—and yet you don't trust me to play a much easier one—even though——

ACTOR

Even though——

ACTRESS

Even though my acting ability is fully equal to yours——

ACTOR

Tut, tut, tut——

ACTRESS

Better, possibly. If not even——

ACTOR

Tut, tut, tut—we won't go into that. There are other matters. But if we should go into it—if we do begin to make comparisons, there isn't an actor in Europe who can touch my Romeo. You are a good Camille, my dear, but you must pardon me if I say I've seen better.

ACTRESS

[*Rises in cold rage. Crosses.*]

You've seen a better Camille? Oh, you mean Duse—good, I agree to that.

ACTOR

[*Mockingly.*]

Sarah wasn't exactly bad—either.

ACTRESS

Sarah? Sarah wasn't bad?

ACTOR

Although a certain critic, a dear friend of yours, wrote that you were better.

ACTRESS

Sarah was better than I? And you say that now —now, for the first time—after keeping it from me all these years?

ACTOR

Well, I thought that while you appreciated *my* art, it was my duty to appreciate yours!

ACTRESS

I appreciate your art! You think I've seen no better Romeo just because I never said so? I won't tell you yet, I won't tell you the name of the man who was better than you. I'll just tell you where I saw him. Do you know where I saw a better Romeo than you? In a stock company in Schmatz!

ACTOR

I have just one thing to ask of you—please don't drag my art into this discussion. I'm not discussing your acting.

ACTRESS

Yes, you are. If you can play the Guardsman so well that I believe in him, why couldn't I play the

woman who believed in the Guardsman, well enough for you to believe in my belief.

ACTOR

Because I simply could not be recognized—whatever you may say.

LIESL

[*Enters up right.*]

Please—please there's a man outside.

ACTRESS

What does he want?

LIESL

I don't know, but he's got a bill.

ACTOR

Tell him to go.

[LIESL *comes to door to tell* CREDITOR *to go, but he steps in, beaming.*]

CREDITOR

Good afternoon, good afternoon. You know really I hate to disturb a great artist like yourself, but couldn't you let me have just a little bit on account? The whole thing's only four hundred and sixty kronen.

ACTOR

[*In* GUARDSMAN'S *tone.*]
Artist. Artist. Who do you take me for?

CREDITOR

He will have his little joke.

ACTOR

Joke. Joke. Don't you understand?

CREDITOR

For twenty years now, I've been calling on you gentlemen of the theater collecting money for Weinlovitz. Excuse me, sir, your own mother might not know you, your own wife might not know you, and you could put on all the uniforms, and wigs, and whiskers in the world, and as long as you owe me money I would know you. [*Pause.* ACTOR *pays him and* CREDITOR *starts out. He halts.*] Now look here, sir, why go to the trouble of all this fancy dress for a rotten four hundred and sixty kronen. It wasn't worth it.

ACTRESS

There you are, my dear.

ACTOR

What?

ACTRESS

Why, even a tradesman.

ACTOR

Of course he would recognize me. I haven't got my boots on. It's broad daylight here and it was dark yesterday—and darker in the box. And suppose he did recognize me—you did not. Oh, no, my dear, that doesn't mean that you recognized me. Not by any manner of means.

MAMA

[*Enters right, mop and pail in hand.*]

Oh, I beg your pardon for appearing in this dress. I did not know you were here, Prince, we did not expect you until after five o'clock, did we, Bebi? But you're so aristocratically punctual, Prince—you arrive so exactly on the hour—I don't quite know what to say. I think I'll go scrub the floors.

ACTOR

Get out, you dirty-faced hag of hell. Get out, get out.

[MAMA *dashes out.*]

ACTRESS

Why, even Mama knew who you were.

ACTOR

I don't care. I don't care. You didn't, you didn't. Prove it to me. How did I give myself away?

ACTRESS

[*Crosses right and thinks.*]

Well, let me see. Oh, yes. You gave yourself away when you praised your own cigarettes. No one else will smoke them.

ACTOR

That doesn't explain anything. That doesn't mean anything.

ACTRESS

And there are other things. Your kiss—but I really mean this seriously. You couldn't disguise your kiss—it was so—so entirely your own—it was impossible not to recognize it.

ACTOR

Yes—I was afraid you recognized my kiss.

ACTRESS

And then your eyes. What was it I told you the day that you first told me you loved me? What was it I told you about your eyes?

ACTOR

That the look in my eyes——

ACTRESS

That sweet, warm, sad look.

ACTOR

That betrayed me!

ACTRESS

Yes. You're looking at me like that now.

ACTOR

I don't want to.

ACTRESS

Oh, if every man who wears a uniform were such a hero as you.

ACTOR

So I am to believe that you recognized me the very first minute?

ACTRESS

The very first moment. You owe that to your peace of mind. Don't say "if" or "but"—I warn you that if you do not believe me now, I have really nothing more to offer. This is the only—[*suddenly*]—and besides it's really true.

ACTOR

Then why didn't you tell me from the beginning?

ACTRESS

Because I wanted you to play the comedy out to the end. I certainly didn't think you'd lack the courage to go through with it. [*Rises.*] I didn't think that you'd rob us of that beautiful night.

ACTOR

[*On his knees.*]
Then you do love me?

ACTRESS

And you will never put me to the test again?

ACTOR

Never again.

ACTRESS

And you love me?

ACTOR

I am so in love with you. Why are you crying?

ACTRESS

Now I can tell you why I am crying—because

you love me so—and because I am just a bit ashamed of myself.

[*She goes to piano and plays Chopin.*]

[*The* CRITIC *enters.*]

CRITIC

On your knees again. What are you dressed up like that for?

ACTOR

Bernhard, I myself was the Guardsman.

CRITIC

[*Exchanges glances with* ACTRESS.]

You were?

ACTOR

And would you believe it, even though I played the Guardsman, she recognized me from the beginning.

CRITIC

Did she?

ACTOR

You look as though you didn't believe it.

CRITIC

[*Crosses right, looking at* ACTRESS; *then to* ACTOR.]

Of course she recognized you.

ACTOR

I wouldn't be surprised if she'd told you all about it.

CRITIC

[*Looks at* ACTRESS; *they laugh.*]

Why, of course she told me. Tell me, will you do me a great favor?

[CRITIC *sits in the armchair left.*]

ACTOR

Yes.

CRITIC

Take off that costume—you look rather ridiculous in it.

[ACTOR *takes off costume and sits in settee right.*]

ACTOR

I'd look even more ridiculous if she hadn't recognized me.

[MAMA *enters complacently from lower right entrance, stepping over costumes tossed behind settee by* ACTOR.]

ACTRESS

Mama, call Liesl and get these costumes out of the way.

MAMA

[*Shouting.*]

Liesl! [LIESL *enters from right upper entrance.*] Liesl, help me get these costumes into this trunk. [LIESL *sets to work, picking up the scattered costumes.* MAMA *holds up* GUARDSMAN *costumes to* ACTOR.] Are you going to wear this tonight?

ACTOR

[*Shouting.*]

No. Why does she annoy me like that? Day in, day out——

[MAMA *talks back to him angrily,* LIESL *begins chattering and the curtain falls on the same scene with which the play began.*]

MEDIUM SLOW CURTAIN